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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"OH, NO! NO! YOU MUST NOT GO! I CANNOT LET YOU GO!" ELAINE CRIED IMPLOARINGLY.

THE TEMPTATION OF ELAINE.

[A NOVELETTE.]

(Concluded.)

CHAPTER IV.

"Five years had passed since little Eva died, and it was now eight years since Gerard Massey left Claremont; and all that weary while Elaine had received no tidings from him, but in her heart of hearts she treasured his message, and told herself he would eventually return to her.

Great changes had occurred since Carey's first declaration of love. Old Mr. Norris was dead; Fred, a tall lad of eighteen, was in a merchant's office in the city, where, if he chose, he might do well.

But the youth had formed undesirable acquaintances, who drew his heart away from earlier and purer scenes, who tempted him an

easy prey into sin, and taught him to be ashamed of the gentle woman who had sacrificed so much for him.

In all his two years' absence he had visited Elaine but once, and then only for two days, which he had filled with complainings of being bored at Claremont.

"There was no society, and a fellow couldn't be expected to content himself with an old maid for a companion!"

Poor Elaine! She overheard his words, and set her teeth tightly upon her nether lip to keep down the passionate cry that rose from her heart.

She was almost glad to see him go, although her whole soul yearned after the graceless young prodigal.

She remembered Mrs. Lake's words concerning the children.—

"You will slip out of their thoughts, their hearts, their lives. The more prosperous they are the heavier and more shameful to them will be the debt of gratitude they owe you."

Ah! surely she had spoken truth, for Mab was away, and scarcely found time to write her; like Fred, she remembered Aunt Elaine only when some little service was required.

Mrs. Fountney, poor Rosa's widowed sister, had lately married her daughter well, and, awaking to a sense of duty, or rather loneliness, had invited Mab to share her home, promising to do much for her.

Without a thought for "auntie," Mab had begged to be allowed to accept the "generous offer," and Elaine, always self-denying, self-forgetful, had consented.

It seemed to her there was no one left to love her. The children were gone, only Iamay, a tall girl of fourteen, and Carey clinging to her.

Once, and only once, Mr. Vanrenan had renewed his suit, but Elaine had firmly and gently told him that she yet waited for Gerard's return.

So in silence and in sorrow those eight long years had passed, and the giddy girls in the village called Miss Norris an old maid, and saw no beauty in her pale, sweet face; called her

dull and old-fashioned; forgot the griefs she had suffered; and the married women, who remembered Gerard, wondered what he had found to admire in her.

To them rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes alone seemed lovely, and Elaine had neither.

Mab wrote occasionally, but only very brief notes, that spoke of her own triumphs and admirers; and it was with a feeling of surprise that Elaine received a letter from Mrs. Fountney, begging her to receive Mab for a few weeks, as the London season had quite exhausted her, and the doctor recommended absolute rest and quiet.

"If she can stay at Claremont until the close of August," wrote the lady, "I shall be glad, as we are going to Brighton in September, and I wish Mab to be as brilliant as usual. She is a great social success, and has pleased me much by her utter disregard of ineligible *parties*. She has none of her mother's foolish, sentimental notions, and, I am sure, will marry well."

Elaine did not feel elated by this eulogy upon Mab, but she wrote a very kind letter, bidding the girl welcome to the cottage; and accordingly she arrived quite early in August.

She scarcely recognised her niece in the fashionably-attired girl who stepped from a first-class carriage, and looked round with an air that was almost supercilious.

She did not recognise the stationmaster or the porters as they touched their caps to her, and she criticised Elaine's dress in a most unashed way. But she was undeniably pretty. "Fine feathers make fine birds," and Mrs. Fountney had supplied her niece with everything to enhance her charms.

"I expect," she said, languidly, "I shall be buried to death while here; Claremont has so few attractions."

"The scenery is beautiful," Elaine suggested, almost timidly, and Mab said, in the same languid tone,—

"I don't care for nature, auntie; I prefer flirting, dancing, driving, to any rural beauties."

Elaine sighed.

Mab remarked sharply,—

"I hope my luggage is safe; there ought to be some conveyance from the station. Auntie, dear, please see my trunks are secure. I have three large ones, two smaller, and four hand-boxes."

She coolly waited whilst Elaine counted over her belongings, then walked on by her side, shading her pretty face with an elegant parasol.

"How hot it is!" she said, presently, "there is positively not a breath of air. Perhaps the heat oppresses me more because I am so far from well. See, auntie," pulling aside a daintily ruffled sleeve, "how thin I am. Oh! I have had a good time, but it has taken it out of me, rather."

"I am afraid you are very ill," the elder woman said, gently; "we must nurse you well again."

"Are there any fresh *beaux*?" Mab asked, almost bluntly, "and is Mr. Vanrenan still unmarried?"

"He is still unmarried," gravely, and her heart sank at the change or rather the development in her niece's character. "Why did you ask that, Mab?"

"I was thinking he would not be a bad *parti*, although he must be almost forty. He has a princely income, a fine and unencumbered estate. My dear auntie, I wonder you never tried to attract him."

"Mab, I wish you had never left me! How changed you are! Oh, my dear! be your old self to me."

The girl laughed.

"No, thank you, auntie. I was a fool to myself in the past; and although your training was *par excellence* in one sense, it was too old-fashioned to advance me one step. I have determined to make a good match. Feelings are so evanescent—so little worth, and money and rank are all in all."

"Mab!" Elaine said, her heart not hardening, but growing softer towards the girl, "your mother left you to my care. Oh, stay with me! come back to the old, innocent happy life!"

"I'll try to make it bright for you. But for pity's sake—for my sake—don't return to those who are warping and spoiling your better nature! You had better be a peasant's wife—if you loved him—than marry the richest man without loving him."

Mab looked at her almost disdainfully.

"I've no fancy for love in a cottage, auntie; and I don't believe in sentiment."

The words sounded strange and incongruous, coming from such rosy, smiling lips.

"The fact is, you've lived so long in this wilderness of a place that you have contracted all sorts of comical, old-world ideas."

Elaine winced, and the slight, ever-ready colour flickered into her face.

"Had one told me six months would so change you, Mab, I would never have allowed you to leave me."

"I think my mother's people are the best judges of what is good for me," the girl retorted, carelessly, and walked up the garden in a languid way—which was, perhaps, the result of her ill-health as much as of her fashionable mode of life.

Old Dorcas ran out to meet her, and would have kissed her, but Mab said, coolly,—

"I'll dispense with the kiss, Dorcas; and pray, don't ruffle my lace." To Elaine she remarked, audibly, "Such people must be kept in their proper places," then went up to her own little room, which smelt now of lavender, and was filled with vases of yellow and red roses.

She tossed aside sunshade and hat, and sat down wearily. The walk had tried her strength severely, and the pretty colour had left her rounded cheeks.

"Oh," she said, regretfully, "I shall die of *ennui* here! How I wish I were with Aunt Fountney! However, next month—next month!" and her great eyes sparkled with anticipation of pleasures at Brighton. "Aunt Elaine begins to look old and pecky," so ran her thoughts as she brushed out the masses of smooth brown hair, and then proceeded to twist them about her shapely head. "How stupid she is to remember Gerard Massey. Hell never marry her; and folks say it she chose she might be mistress of the Hall! There is no accounting for some men's taste," contemptuously. Then Dorcas summoned her to dinner, which had been delayed on her account.

Later Carey Vanrenan made his appearance. Once, and only once, during the past five years had he renewed his suit, and Elaine had told him gently, but firmly, there could never be anything but friendship between them.

Still he visited her, hoping against hope—loving as only men of his nature can love—purely, strongly, unselfishly.

He found Elaine sitting with Ismay at an open window, whilst Mab lay upon a couch—a slim, graceful figure in white, with a face as innocent as if no thought of "eligible *parties*" had ever crossed her busy little brain.

He shook hands with her, and expressed himself glad to see her again; and, with an imperious gesture, half-coquettish, half grave, she motioned him to sit beside her.

"Talk to me," she said, with a pretty, artificial smile. "I am positively dying to hear the Claremont news," and she flashed a glance at him through her heavy brown lashes. "Auntie has grown so awfully quiet. Won't she make a charming old maid!"

Mab laughed softly.

"How hot you can be in her defence! But pray, don't be angry with me. I meant no harm. I have only fallen into a flippant way of speech. Remember, too, I am an invalid, and must be humoured."

"Even to your own hurt!" coolly. "I for one shall not join in the general spoiling, Miss Mab."

She pouted prettily.

"You imply I am spoiled. That is hardly nice."

"Now tell me, seriously, Mr. Vanrenan, am I not improved in every respect?"

She lifted saucy eyes to his, but he made answer with grave deliberation,—

"No; I preferred you when you were a careless hoyden. Your manner, like your dress, is elegant but unreal." Then he crossed to Elaine and bent over her, leaving Mab a trifle vexed. "Come out with me," he said. "I want to tell you news that you will call good."

Without word Elaine rose and followed him into the garden.

"It is about Gerard," she said, and her voice was tremulous—her face white with agitation.

"Yes," he answered, gently: "it is of Mr. Massey I wish to speak. I have heard to-day from Mr. Pomfret that he is on his way home." He paused, but she did not speak, only in her lovely eyes there was a look he had never seen before. "You are happy," and he wondered at his own hoarse tones.

"Yes," she whispered, "I am very happy;" then, with sudden remembrances, she glanced into the pale, grave face, and cried, remorsefully, "Ah! forgive me! I had forgotten you. Oh! if I could make you happy, too! You have been always so good to me; and I have never done anything to deserve your loving kindness, nor to show my gratitude."

He smiled sadly.

"Don't remember me or my pain; think only that I have always found my greatest joy in working for, and ministering to you. I know now, my dear, that you have been right in not listening to me. No word I could say has ever had power to bring such a look of gladness into eyes as the mere tidings of his return has done. But when he comes, you will not deny me your friendship! I think I have so much claim upon you!" and, impulsively, she laid her little hands in his.

"Can I ever forget your goodness and all I owe you?" she questioned, and in the gathering dusk she looked young again; as in the days when Gerard had found her fair and loved her. "Tell me," she said, in a low voice, "all that you know of him," and in that hour's gladness she did not doubt he was returning to her. She judged his heart by the loyalty of her own.

"He has made a fortune, and is returning to spend the remainder of his life in England. I cannot tell you more than this, unless I add what seems superfluous—he is still unmarried."

They stayed long in the dusky garden, and when at length Carey left her, he went with slow, sad steps to his own home, and the lines of thought and care were very visible upon his brow and about his firm mouth.

Elaine gilded across the little lawn, a smile in her eyes and about her lips.

"My joy makes me selfish to-night," she whispered; "but to-morrow I will be sorry for him."

Ismay had gone to her room, but Mab lay upon the couch still, looking pale and weary. She glanced at Elaine with an expression of wonder.

"What has happened to you? You are quite transformed!" she said, and the other lay beside her, laying her happy face against her niece's.

"Mab, be glad with me!" she said. "He is coming home."

Mab lifted herself on her elbow and stared with unmilitated surprise at the flushed cheeks and shining eyes.

"Has he written telling you so, or did Mr. Vanrenan bring the tidings? Were I you, auntie, I wouldn't build my hopes too much upon Gerard Massey. Why can't you think of your other suitor? According to the old vulgarism, 'a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush!'

Elaine drew away from her, hurt and a little angry; but the girl went on coolly.—

"You haven't met for eight years, and he doubtless remembers you as you were!"

"And you see so great a change in me that you think he will be disappointed?"

Her lip quivered, and for a few moments the happy light left her eyes. Mab regarded her with some show of scorn.

"It is foolish to rely upon a man's constancy; and, for aught we know, to the contrary, he may

have left a Hindoo wife behind. I don't think it a proof of love that he has kept silent for eight years. It reminds me of the prince in the story who 'loitered on the road too long,' and 'trifled at the gate.'

For the first time in her life Mab saw Elaine really enraged. She sprang up and cried out sharply.—

"Silence! silence! Oh, shame on you to mock at my love and my waiting. Was it not for your sake I sent Gerard away? Because you were bound to me by ties of blood, and I had given my word to work for you, love you, did I not deny myself all joy, and put away from me all I prized? For your sakes I endured his anger and sent him away lonely, doubting my faith and my love; and when others told me what reward I should reap for all my pains I would not listen or believe. But the prophecy has fulfilled itself; Fred is dead, Fred has forgotten me, you despise me, and if, as you hint, Gerard no longer loves me, or, seeing me, turns from me, oh, Heaven! what shall I do? Oh! why have you spoiled my first hour of happiness? I would rejoice in your joy, why do you grudge me mine?" and suddenly she covered her face with her hands and sobbed bitterly.

Mab, frightened and a trifle ashamed, lay huddled upon the couch, but she ventured to say:—

"Auntie, you misunderstood me. My intention was not unkindly; I only wished to prepare you against a possible disappointment. And as for your goodness to us, why none would deny it; and you, wrong me greatly when you say I despise you."

Elaine lifted her head wearily.

"Child," she said, for between seventeen and twenty-eight there seemed an immeasurable distance, "I see more clearly than I used to do, and I know how you esteem me; but I was wrong to be so angry with you. Perhaps, as you say, Gerard will be disappointed in me."

"I'm sure, aunt, you are very pretty and remarkably young in appearance," with all the insolence of careless youth; "but I do think it's a pity you won't listen to Mr. Vanneman. I haven't a doubt that he is a far handsomer man than Gerard Massey, who probably has grown stout and bald. I've heard India doesn't improve a man's appearance."

"Would you like to go to your room?" Elaine asked, abruptly. "You look tired," and Mab, thankful to escape an unpleasant *tête-à-tête*, went gladly.

As Elaine passed Ismay's door the girl opened it, and lifted her face for the goodnight kiss.

"Miss Norris," she said, quickly, "you have been crying. What has happened? Has Mab been saying unkind things?" and the pretty dark face flushed angrily.

"My darling, no; I have only been very foolish."

Bat Ismay shook her head doubtfully, and said,—

"If you are in any trouble you must let Uncle Carey help you—and—and I have some money."

Elaine smiled.

"I do not require any money, dear; now go to bed and to sleep. Good-night, Ismay."

"Good-night, dear Miss Norris," and the child watched her with loving eyes as she passed slowly along the corridor.

Day after day passed, and Mab was fast recovering her lost health and bloom, and was full of lively anticipations of pleasures to come when she should join Mrs. Fountayne at Brighton; and one morning there came a letter to Elaine in a handwriting that made her tremble and grow pale with passionate love and joy.

Shutting herself in her room, with hasty fingers she broke the seal, and through a mist of happy tears read the only words that Gerard had written her in eight weary years.

"Carlton Hotel, London, W.

"MY OWN DARLING,—

"I am now in London, as you will see by the above address, and only waiting a line to bring me back to you. When I left you in

anger and pride I was an obstinate and selfish fool, and could see no beauty in the sacrifice you then made. But passing years have taught me wisdom, taught me too that I never was, and never shall be worthy you. And yet, my darling, if you can forget the cruel things I said at parting, and the pain I have made you bear; if you can assure me you still love me as once you did, I will come to you and we will not part again. If your heart is hard against me, remember that no other woman has ever won a second thought from me; and if you will not fulfil your promise of long ago I shall, for your dear sake, be a lonely man through all my life. You will say, why did I not write you before? To which I answer I was afraid, and many times I pictured you the wife of some good man, and not until I received word to the contrary from Mr. Fountayne would I venture to address you again in the character of a lover. I know your heart is too good, too tender to keep me in suspense. I deserve no kindness from you, and yet I fear no harshness. My darling, good-bye.—Yours until death,

"GERARD MASSEY."

The patient, loving woman sobbed aloud in her new, great joy, and when her tears were passed she was still so agitated and so happy she could find but few words to reply to his entreaty, but those few spoke volumes.

"As I loved you once I love you now. Come to me, Gerard."

They contented him.

Late one summer evening he arrived at Claremont, and walking swiftly to the cottage, was met by Doreas in the clematis-covered porch. She welcomed him warmly, although in her heart of hearts, she did not love him. He had grown a beard and was very bronzed, very handsome, and yet there was less of sincerity and honesty in his eyes than once there had been—men did say he had won his fortune by subtlety.

But the old servant knew nothing of this, so she simply told him "Miss Elaine was alone in the parlour," and made way for him to pass. Outside the door he paused, his heart throbbing with old memories that he had long ago believed dead; inside Elaine stood trembling, flushed, happy, dressed with utmost care in some soft clinging material sent her by Mrs. Lake, which gleamed and glistened in the lamplight, showing red and cream, and shading away into manifold hues. She looked young as in the old days, and when Gerard entered it seemed to him scarce a day had passed over since they parted.

"My darling!" he cried, in that moment loving her passionately, "my darling!" and with one low cry of satisfied longing she ran into his outstretched arms, and clung about him, sobbing out so sweet a welcome that the man's heart might well leap within him.

"Forgive me, dear," she pleaded, and the shining eyes, lifted to his, told no tale of remembered wrongs, and the voice, all broken with tears, breathed only of unwavering love and trust.

"Oh!" she cried, her arms about his neck, "What shall I say to welcome you back? Gerard, my dear, my dear, I can say nothing, I can only feel glad;" then for awhile she lay in his embrace, and it seemed to both that this night, happy as it was, was only the beginning of a long series of happy years.

It was long before they could talk coherently, and when at last Elaine found space to speak between Gerard's passionate kisses, she told him the story of her life since he left her under the old apple tree. Many times Carey Vanneman's name was spoken, until at last the lover jealously demanded to know more about him, and Elaine disclosed all except his love for her, his goodness, and generosity; and Gerard said with a frown,—

"Now I have returned he must visit the cottage less frequently; and, love, the school must be dismissed, I want my wife to come to me with all possible speed; I have waited long enough for her." Then he lifted her face between his hands, "you have not changed in the least; you are just as pretty and quite as young in appearance as when first I loved you."

"Wait," she said, with a smile, "to-night I wear butterly plumage; in the morning, when I put on my sober dress, you will be compelled to change your opinion," but with a kiss he drew her nearer, laughing her words to scorn.

He heard the sound of girlish voices in the hall, but neither Ismay nor Mab came to disturb them. He had much to tell Elaine, and she thought he was laying his whole life bare before her. She did not dream there were passages in it he could not divulge to her for very shame; she saw no change in him, she believed wholly and entirely in him as in the early days of their love.

It was late when he rose to go, and he begged her to walk with him to the garden gate; so together they trod the familiar path, he with his arm passed about her waist, she looking into his face with passionate, satisfied love. How pretty she was with the moonlight playing upon her hair and happy face! How low and exquisite her voice. A sense of deep and perfect rest came over Gerard as he stood silent beside her.

Then once more he stooped to kiss the tender mouth and wishing her good-bye, yet returned again and again, tearfully able to tear himself from her.

Long she stood listening to his retreating steps, long after he had reached the inn she watched lest haply he might return; then she strolled back to the house and to her room, to kneel down and thank Heaven for its goodness to her.

The new delicious sense of joy made her night wakful; but she rose early in the morning fresh and fair, and went about her duties with a light heart; the children wondered at the brightness of her face—the unusual tenderness in her voice. The tasks did not weary her, the pupils, if stupid, did not harass her, because Gerard had returned to her, and life could be no longer dark for her.

Meanwhile Mab wandered by herself through some adjacent meadows, inwardly voting life at Claremont a fearful bore, and wishing herself away. Very pretty she looked that morning, walking with a careless grace and carrying her hat upon her arm; the dainty colour had returned to her cheeks, and she was fair enough to delight an artist's soul.

Weary of meadows and lane, of all the beauties spread out before her, she turned homeward at last, and entering the garden leaned upon the gate, and gave herself up to discontented musings.

Gerard came upon her suddenly, and before she knew he was near, he had taken in every detail of face and form, every blemish of the dainty dress. It flashed upon him this tall, slim girl must be Mab, and he called her by her name, startling her considerably.

She bent a pair of great grey eyes upon him inquisitorily, and he saw she was very pretty; then she slowly and languidly put out one small hand to meet his, and said,—

"You are Mr. Massey, I think!"

"Have I grown beyond knowledge?" he questioned, smilingly, and Mab answered, coolly,—

"I have been picturing you to myself as bald and stout. Mr. Massey, you are a mare and a delusion."

"Believe me I am so unintentionally," laughing; "if I had not enjoyed my bachelor freedom so long I should probably appear as 'the bald party.' Elaine will remedy all such defects, doubtless."

Mab's arch eyes met his, and she laughed.

"I wonder you recognize me. I was such a tiny child when you went away, and now I am taller than auntie, and I have been out a whole season."

"It was not difficult to recognize you," he answered, "and you have grown wonderfully like Elaine, only your eyes are grey, whilst hers are purple—and of course you look younger."

"Yes"—complacently—"she looks old unless when excited, and she really lacks animation; otherwise she is pretty."

Gerard's expression was one of mild surprise, as he answered,—

"I could see no change in her last night; she looked exactly as she did when I first asked her to marry me."

Mab smiled a trifle disdainfully.

"Love is blind, Mr. Massey; but shall we go into School is ended; see, the children are leaving."

She walked to the door with him then, flitted upstairs, and he entering the schoolroom found Elaine there alone. As she rose to meet him the level beams of the relentless sun fell athwart her face, and discovered certain faint indications of care upon the broad brow; and Gerard thought that in her plain brown dress, with simple linen cuffs and collar, she looked neither so young nor so fair as on the previous evening.

He stifled the thought as being disloyal to her, and took her in his arms. Whilst she clung about him the old tenderness and love revived—there is so much in the touch of a hand, the sound of a voice. The feeling that possessed him all through his long voyage held away over him once more; and yet—yet, half his gladness at meeting Elaine again was the result of only yearning for familiar faces and scenes. He smoothed the rippling hair away from her brow—certainly her beauty was on the wane—but she lifted her lips to his and again he was content.

But why was it that, as he walked back to the inn, a younger face than hers flitted before his mental vision, and ringing tones, less true, less tender than hers, sounded persistently in his ears?

He was discontented with himself and all around, and once the thought flashed through his brain that he had been wiser to have held his peace about their mutual love until he had seen the changes time had made in his former betrothed—until he had tested the depth and sincerity of his own old passion.

But in the evening he went again to the Cottage, to find Carey Vanrenan there, doing his best to amuse Mab and Ismay, and he felt angry that this dark, grave man should claim so much of the former's attention. Perhaps to disguise this feeling he begged Elaine to put on her hat and walk through the meadows with him; the night was clear and brilliant, so that he could see her happy face and the wonderful light in her eyes.

A sense of his own unworthiness came upon him as he held her closer.

"My dear," he said, "I'm a poor sort of a fellow for so good a woman as you; for your sake I wish I were better."

The small, slim hands about his arm tightened their clasp as she said,—

"Don't you know I would not have you different if I could! As for your unworthiness, it is not palpable to me, Gerard."

"Yes," he thought, bending over her, "she is still very pretty," and was almost satisfied.

"Elaine," he said, abruptly, "does Vanrenan often come here?" and his face had clouded suddenly.

"Why, yes, almost every day when school is ended. You see, Ismay is his niece."

"But he comes principally to see you," testily. "Ismay Lake is but a flimsy excuse at the best, and his manner towards you is too familiar. I shall beg him to make his visits more rare, and his friendship towards you less pronounced."

Elaine looked startled.

"My dear," she said, gently, "you cannot tell how good he has been to me; you would not anger him or wound him in any way. But for his kindness many a time I should have given up the fight I have so long maintained—"

Gerard broke in passionately,—

"You have praised him very highly—have you finished? It may be I am jealous, but I will have no rival in your love—I must be all or nothing!"

Ah! long ago he had used those very words to her, and at the remembrance her avert face paled, and her wonderful eyes looked reproachfully into his, but she said,—

"Do not let us quarrel, dear; it shall be as you wish. I will tell Mr. Vanrenan to-morrow that you object to our friendship. But, Gerard, if you forbid me to meet him, although I shall obey you my heart will cherish the memory of his goodness, and will long to prove its gratitude to one

who has always stood my friend, counsellor, and help."

For her the glory of the evening was past, and an uneasy sense of something wrong oppressed her.

"The night is spoiled for us," she said, "let us go in, Gerard."

He went in with her, ill at ease with himself, resolving in his own mind that she could never content him. What a fool he had been to compromise himself by that letter. How idiotic had been his joy of the previous night! It came upon him fiercely that he did not love her, and he scarcely understood why he had written her to the contrary.

Old scenes, old associations, had softened his hard nature, until he himself believed he loved her as in the days of their lost youth; but that dream was broken, and he felt angry (as a man always does when he is in the wrong), and tried to cast the blame of it all upon Elaine.

Together they entered the room, where Ismay was talking in a whisper to Vanrenan, and Mab, seated at the piano, was carolling the chorus of a not too-refined or intellectual song.

"It's best to be merry and wise, it's best to be honest and true; it's best to be off with the old love before you are on with the new."

Gerard wondered why her words struck so sharply on his senses, and why, when she rose and came towards him, he grew more angry with Elaine.

"You think me frivolous as all the others do," said Mab, and her voice was softer than usual.

He found no words with which to answer her; he only knew he was glad she was by him, and Elaine had flitted to Vanrenan's side.

The lamp was not lit, and he saw Mab's face only by the moonlight.

How fair it was! How slim and willowy her white-robbed figure! How bright her great grey eyes!

"Talk to me," she said, imperiously: "I am positively dying of silence," and she sat down so close by him he could touch her hand.

Meanwhile Elaine was talking softly, earnestly to Carey.

"Mr. Vanrenan"—ah! how her voice trembled with pity for him—"I have a very difficult task to perform. I wish it had fallen to any but me."

"You have a message from Massey to me?" he questioned, steadily, although his strong heart quailed before the blow he knew she was about to strike.

"Yes. Do not think harshly of him. He is jealous of our friendship, and begs your visits may be less frequent. Oh, my friend, my friend, forgive me! Believe I am not ungrateful or forgetful; only now—now—"

"Now you must obey him," Carey said, no stir in his tone or manner. "I understand, and thank you for telling me yourself. I shall not come again until you need me. Ismay must visit the Hall daily."

Without another word he passed from the room, no one heeding him save Ismay, who looked after him with dismayed eyes, and questioningly,—

"Oh! Miss Norris, what have you said to uncle?"

But Elaine could not reply.

CHAPTER V.

So Gerard had his way, and separated Elaine from her best, perhaps only friend, yet he was not satisfied. If he saw a cloud cross her face he would jealousy intimate that she was thinking of Vanrenan, and missed his daily visits more keenly than she would have felt his own absence.

She said very little in answer to these upbraidings, because she told herself they were the result of his love, and so forgave him.

As the days lengthened into weeks a great change came over him. He was always moody or recklessly gay, knowing no medium; and Elaine

pondered in her own mind what could trouble him.

She was far from guessing the truth, never once associated the change with Mab; and she believed so firmly in Gerard that she never for one instant doubted his fidelity. But all through those golden August days whilst she sat busy with her pupils, he wandered through meadow and lane with Mab, who began to exercise a nameless influence over him. At first he strove against it with all his might, but long years of selfish indulgence had weakened his powers of resistance, and in a very little while he gave himself wholly up to the charm of her society—the new passion that must destroy Elaine's happiness. He sought Mab on every available opportunity; he shared her pleasures, he read to her, talked more brilliantly to her than he had ever done to Elaine, and the girl was fascinated. The little heart she had had surrendered to him, and did not recognise the base part she was playing towards his *fiancee*.

Carey Vanrenan, meeting them often in his walks, grew afraid for Elaine, but he said nothing, only a hot resentment smouldered in his heart, waiting for but a breath to fan it into flame.

One day he came upon Mab alone, and determined to appeal to her sense of right. His grave face was very kind, though firm, and because of her youth he suppressed all the harshness so ready to creep into his voice.

"May I walk with you, Mab?" he asked.

And she answered, readily,—

"I shall be glad if you will. I hate solitary rambles."

"Where is Mr. Massey?"

The girl lifted her eyebrows in pretty surprise, but she flushed a little, too, as she said,—

"I don't know, Mr. Vanrenan. We have not seen him at the cottage to-day."

She toyed nervously a moment with her sunshade, then asked, swiftly,—

"Why did you put that question to me? I— I am not his keeper."

The man took her little disengaged hand in a kind clasp.

"Why do I ask? Because he is almost invariably with you. My dear, I think you don't understand the wrong you are committing. I am unwilling to believe you would bring sorrow to Miss Norris."

"Really," she faltered, "if you wish me to comprehend your meaning you must speak more plainly."

"I am sorry that you force me to do so," dropping her hand. "I wanted to spare you as far as was possible, but you will not have it so. Very well, Mab, I will speak plainly. You are doing a wrong and unwomanly thing when you encourage the attentions of Gerard Massey—a man who has so long been promised to another woman. That you do so I am assured by many signs you have unconsciously shown me; I don't blame you so harshly as Massey, because he is so much your senior, and knows very well he is treading on dangerous ground."

"You are presumptuous, Mr. Vanrenan; neither Mr. Massey nor myself forget his engagement."

He smiled bitterly. "You must suppose me extremely credulous to place faith in such a statement, and you don't understand that by your own words you make your conduct appear blacker, if you do not forget the greater shame to you both."

Mab grew frightened of this dark, angry-faced man, who spoke so unsparingly.

"Mr. Vanrenan," she said, almost tearfully, "you are very unjust to me—and you used to be kind."

"I wish to be so now," gravely, "if you will allow me. I should like always to stand your friend. Child! child! what is it you are doing? Will you wantonly steal away your aunt's love?"

At the reproach in his voice she became angry; lately she had listened only to compliments and pretty falsehoods. Vanrenan's words stung her.

"Am I to blame if Mr. Massey prefers my sister to auntie's? I don't say that he does; but

if she loses him the fault lies at her own door, not mine."

"Will you tell me how you can draw such a conclusion?" calmly, with stern eyes bent on her.

"Is she not faded, and precious to a fault? Of course she cannot help her pretty looks waning; but she pleased herself when she sent him away more than eight years since. If she had loved him she could not have done that. What man's love would survive so great a separation?"

"Have you finished?" his voice sounded hoarse and strange. "Oh, Heaven! Can you forget that for your sake she sent him away, almost breaking her heart in that act?"

"She should not have considered us," insolently.

And he retorted, sharply,—

"If she had not where would you have found a refuge? But for Miss Norris you would have been a pauper child. Your mother's people disowned you; and but that you are pretty and accomplished, and Mrs. Founteyn in need of a companion, you might have starved and she not cared. Mab, be true to your womanhood; for Heaven's sake don't do this thing you meditate. Think of Elaine's perfect sacrifice of self, of youth, and love, and joy. Think of the long years in which she toiled for you, until heart and brain alike were so weary she scarce could perform her daily duties. Think of the bitter and unjust words she endured from her lover in that cruel parting. In all, through all, she never reproached you with her loss, never reminded you of benefits you carelessly took and easily forgot! Think of her long years of patient waiting, of looking for one who neither wrote nor came; remember how her faith in him never faltered. Call to your mind her gladness when at last she saw him. Oh! imagine her joy when she found (as she believed and still believes) that his love remained unchanged—how she lives in the thought that soon she will be his wife—"

"Mr. Vanrenan," deditantly, "you think so highly of auntie yourself that Gerard might well be jealous."

He stayed her with a quick, imperative gesture.

"This subject is doubtless unpleasant to you, but my desire to spare Miss Norris pain renders me careless of your feelings. I have long known that both you and Fred are incapable of gratitude in its lowest form; that nothing she has done or can do will win from you the most meagre affection. But for decency's sake leave her this man, who, however worthless he is, alone can content her. Don't draw down upon yourself the contempt of every honest creature. Don't let it ever be said that you ate her bread, were sheltered by her roof, grew strong under her loving care, benefited by her griefs, her sacrifices, and then bit the hand that had lavished nothing but good upon you. Fred has forgotten her, or remembers her only when he needs her help; you have shown yourself glad to leave her for worldly advantage. For Heaven's sake show there is some remnant of the woman in you yet."

"Why don't you attack Mr. Massey instead of a defenceless girl? As for your accusations, I scorn to answer them," angrily, and she shrank a little from him.

"Because in answering them you would condemn yourself. They admit of no denial. And let me say that I appealed to you, thinking that one so young could not be utterly base—believing you might be deterred from doing this great wrong and embittering all your after life! Child, if I have spoken harshly, it has been for your good and future happiness."

"I am extremely flattered by your interest in me," insolently, "but am sorry it takes so brutal a form." She stooped to remove a bramble from her dress; then, lifting herself again and facing him with bright eyes, and face so like, yet so unlike, Elaine's said,—

"Suppose we postpone the remainder of this very pleasant *à la carte* until another day! I am really incapable of listening to you any longer. Good-morning, Mr. Vanrenan," and so left him.

He did not attempt to arrest or follow her,

only he watched her with eyes from which all anger had gone, and in which only a vast pity for Elaine remained. Who should tell the woman he loved of the terrible grief that had drawn so near to her; certainly he could not. He could not bear to dash that new-born brightness from her face, or darken the wonderful light in her eyes. His thoughts all unconsciously framed themselves into the complaint of the poet: "Oh, love, my love! I had you but loved me! Surely, surely, it had been better for her."

That evening Elaine went from home reluctantly; but a poor, sick woman had sent, begging to see her, if but for a short time, and she could not shut her heart against the appeal. It was quite dusk when she returned, and at each step she hoped the next would bring Gerard in sight. She thought, with a little pang, he might have been more eager to meet her. When she reached the garden it was deserted, but she stayed a moment to gather a cluster of jasmine blooms, and fasten them at her throat. Then she went in. Her soft skirts made no noise as she moved; her step was light, and the inmates of the pretty parlour were too engrossed with each other to hear or heed her approach, so she stood in the doorway, and in the dim light saw a white figure she knew was Mab's; the man was so much in the shadow that his outline was indistinct; but he had an arm about the girl, and one of her white hands lay upon his shoulder. Faint, with a sudden, awful dread, Elaine neither moved nor spoke, and, as she stood there, statuesque in her fear, the man's voice broke the silence,—

"Mab, my pretty darling," and the wretched listener shivered but made no outcry, for the voice was Gerard's. Then the girl, for whom she had suffered and toiled and been as a tender mother, uttered her fear, but in her tone there was no shadow of shame,—

"Love, love, how shall we tell auntie!"

A voice, shrill with anguish, cried through the darkness,—

"No need to tell her, she knows—oh, Heaven! she knows!" and in the moment's surprise the guilty pair stood silent and confused. Then she, to whom all things were cruel, spoke again, as she slowly drew near them. "Have you hurt me enough," she said, "or will you stay to show me your joy—to contrast it with my anguish? Oh, Heaven! this was my lover, this was to have been my husband so soon, and this my niece, the child of my tenderest care. Go! go! go! your presence hurts me!"

And then Gerard spoke, whilst Mab shrank further into the darkness, being afraid. The man went quite near to the woman he had so often sworn "to love and cherish" until death, and his tones were hoarse and unsteady with the consciousness of her agony and his treachery.

"Elaine," he said, "my conduct must look very black to you; but upon my honour it was not premeditated. I meant to be true to you; I strove with all my might to keep my faith, but I could not."

"Go on," she said, when he paused. "You cannot wound me more cruelly than you have already done."

"If only you had not sent me away this would not have happened," glad to cast all reproach upon her if possible. "How could I believe you loved me best? And few men would keep faith so long as I."

"Why?"—she demanded, passionately—"why did you send me that message to buoy me up with false hopes? Why did you ever return to me if you were not sure of your heart? Heaven! have I not borne enough anguish that this should be laid upon me? Oh, Gerard, Gerard! you had done well to kill me rather than teach me this most cruel lesson!"

Then Mab stepped forward, a touch of generosity making her defend her lover.

"Auntie," she said, "he is not to blame. All that has happened is due to me, and me only;" but Elaine cried, sharply,—

"Go away, I cannot breathe, where you are. Go away, I say. I never wish to see your face again."

This was an entirely new Elaine, and Gerard was startled, whilst Mab, too frightened to con-

sider anyone but herself, slipped from the room, and locked herself in her little upstairs chamber. When she was gone Elaine grew quieter. With a stony horror on her face she drew quite close to Gerard, and peering through the gathering shadows, scanned his features with tortured eyes. Then she said, in dull, unbroken tones,—

"You might have spared me this. You should have remembered how cruel my life has been, and so have shown me mercy. What have I done that you should so ill-treat me? Am I less fair than once I was? Your look says yes; and if so, was it not tolling for her and watching for you made me? Oh, Heaven! I never thought to speak thus to you, but to-night—to-night I think I am mad. I have no control over myself, no sense of anything but pain. Have not these eight years been one long story of woe? Gerard, oh, Gerard!" and as she caught and clasped his hands in her tears fell fast; and he was glad she wept, "for now," he said, "she will be calmer."

He bent over the shuddering form.

"Elaine," he said, lamely, "you will always have my most affectionate esteem; we can always be friends."

"Friends!" she cried, with a fierce laugh, "friends, with the memory of this scene before us. No, rather let us be strangers lest the constant sight of me teaches you to hate me, because it recalls your treachery to you, and because from loving I might grow to hate you, since you have laid my whole life bare."

His heart smote him then, and he laid his hand upon her arm.

"My dear, my dear, I am sorry——"

"Sorry!" she interrupted, with passionate scorn. "Oh! speak truth to me now. Your favourite dog's death would grieve you infinitely more than my spoiled life does. Do not touch me, do not speak again—only go. I have borne too much already. Let me alone. What have you to do with me any longer?"

She swayed forward, and caught at the table, he ashamed and angry moved towards the door; then all her fierce disdain died out, and she was again the gentle Elaine. She snatched out her hands to him.

"Stay; perhaps I have been too hard, and my heart feels only its own pain, even to the exclusion of yours. Oh! wish me good-bye—speak kindly—for the last time. After to-night do not let us meet again. Kiss me, because you once loved me, and because I still love you."

And then as he held her in his arms she broke into pitiful sobs that struck upon his heart and appealed to his better self.

"Elaine, my dear, my dear, what shall I say, what shall I do? If I forget my own joy to minister to yours will you be happier? Oh! don't ask such a sacrifice of me, anything but that—anything rather than give up Mab, and I will obey you even to my own cost."

In the darkness he did not see her mournfully, bitter smile, as she echoed,—

"Anything but that. Ah, Gerard, I don't say return to your allegiance, because the heart is a wild thing and resists control, and I know, too, that 'love once dead' does not revive again. No, all I ask is that you will leave here—Clarendon—as soon as possible. I do not wish to see you any more. Say, too, to Mab that as her strength has been restored so quickly to her she has an excuse to return to her aunt. I—I cannot meet her day after day with friendly face and voice. She, too, must go. Now kiss me. Oh, Heaven, this is worse than death. If I have not angered you too deeply, if you have any compassion for me, say 'Heaven bless you,' and go."

Her hands were clasped behind his head, her wonderful eyes blazed in the darkness.

He bent and kissed her once upon the mouth, and muttered, brokenly,—

"Heaven bless you!" and before she had time to miss the clasp of his arms he was gone, and she stood forsaken and alone in the room where he had so often protested his love.

Like one stricken with sudden blindness she felt her way to the sofa with trembling, uncertain hands, and, reaching it, fell prone upon it, almost mad with the bitter anguish of that night.

A little silvery gleam of light entered the room and pierced the gathering darkness, touched the bowed, dark head lovingly, trembled over the pretty, prostrate figure; the sky grew bright with myriad stars, the moon rose higher, and the narrow streak of light became a broad, level beam, until it bathed Elaine's whole form in its silvery radiance.

Still she did not move, or lift her weary head; still no sob broke from the white lips, and no tear stained the pallor of her agonised face.

Tea o'clock struck, and Ismay grew anxious about her protracted absence.

"Dorcas," she said, "where can Miss Norris be? Shall we go to meet her?"

But Dorcas answered,—

"I saw her come in a long time back, and I've been wondering she didn't ring. I think there have been high words between her and Mr. Massey; and Miss Mab went to her room more than an hour ago."

With a vague feeling of alarm Ismay ran to the parlour, and seeing Elaine prone upon the couch, cried out in alarm, and hastened to her side.

"Miss Norris! Oh! dear Miss Elaine!" she said, "what is it? Tell me, dear!" and then the weary head was lifted, and the agonised eyes met hers.

The moonbeams made the ghastly face appear ghastlier.

"Oh!" cried Ismay, "what has happened? Speak to me, my dear, dear friend," and began to chafe the hands that were icy cold, despite the sultriness of the evening; and yet Elaine kept that strange silence, and the wonderful eyes seemed larger and brighter in their pain than ever Ismay had seen them.

The girl's tender heart ached for the woman who had filled her mother's place so well, and her tears fell fast on the fingers she clasped in her own.

"For pity's sake! speak or cry! But do not—do not look like this; you frighten me!"

And then Elaine sat up.

"Is it you, Ismay?" in a dreary voice. "How long have I been here? Why did you seek me? Leave me alone—go your way, to your pleasure and your work—the others have forsaken me, and, if you are wise, you will follow their example."

Ismay knelt by her, drew her head down upon her own breast.

"You are very miserable, or you would not counsel me to play so false a part. Oh! my friend! my friend! let others do as they will, Uncle Carey and I will always cleave to you. Have you—have you quarrelled with Mr. Massey?"

"We have parted!" coldly and steadily, "and he is to marry Mab. Hush! Perhaps it is better so; only just now—just now it seems so very hard!" and then the merciful tears came, and the girl did not attempt to stay them.

"Let her cry," she thought, "it will do her good and ease the pain of her heart!"

It was very late when she went to her own room, but Mab was listening for her, and when she heard her step, opened her door and called her softly.

Ismay paused reluctantly.

"What do you want, Mab?"

"I heard you talking to auntie, and I want you to tell me what she says about—about Gerard and—"

"And you?" questioned Ismay. "She said very little, and tried not to blame either of you."

Mab took her by the arm and drew her in, closing the door. She wheeled a chair towards the girl, but she said she preferred standing, so they faced each other, such an utter and violent contrast as is not often seen.

The tall, slim, fashionable young lady, still dressed in her laces and jewels, with her bright brown hair elaborately dressed, grey eyes and fair skin; and the schoolgirl, so unformed in face and figure, dark as an Italian, with eyes that seemed to have opened under other than English skies, large, soft, unfathomable, true and clear; and in her features there was already the pro-

mise of a higher and nobler beauty than Mab could ever boast.

"What did auntie say?" Mab asked again, impatiently, for Ismay's steady scrutiny made her uneasy, and she felt inclined to shake her into speech.

"What Miss Norris said I shall not repeat, because it was too merciful and kind; but I will remind you what those who learn your conduct will think of you. You are a snake in the grass, an ingrate, and Mr. Massey is a cowardly traitor."

"Thank you! I want no gratuitous insults! If you came here to make objectionable remarks I shall be obliged if you will go at once."

Ismay Lake's pale, dark face flushed dully, but she laughed shortly as she said,—

"Had you not invited me here I should not have come; this interview is not of my seeking, and now I will say good-night. If your dreams are pleasant, you will get more than your deserts."

All that night Elaine lay sleepless upon her bed. With the early morning she rose and went to Mab.

That young lady lifted herself on her elbow, and looked a little anxiously at her visitor.

"I felt I must speak to you, and so came here to avoid interruption. Last night, perhaps I spoke too bitterly, if so, I ask your pardon. But, henceforth, Mabel, let us have plain dealing; after what has occurred you must feel it impossible for you to remain here. I shall be glad if you will write Mrs. Fountney, your health is so far improved that you are willing and able to rejoin her. I don't think I could bear your engagement should become public talk while you are here—but when you have returned to your aunt there is no reason why it should not be declared. For your mother's sake I will try to forgive you, although the task is so hard a one; and for her sake I will try to meet you, when—when my grief is less sharp. That I can ever take you into my love, or hold you as dear as hitherto you have been, is impossible to me. I think I have no more to say!"

Then suddenly her calmness failed her—her self-control gave away.

"Oh! why have you done this thing? Was there not trouble enough in my life that you should strike this blow? Could none of your suitors content you that you must set yourself to win him from me? Was I so hard to you in days gone by that you must needs revenge yourself thus?" and in answer to those passionate inquiries Mab could only plead, lamely,—

"I am sorry, auntie. I did not think of or mean wrong to you; and it isn't all my fault that Gerard does not love you any longer. You must see that, however prejudiced you are against me."

"Yes, I see it plainly," in her usual quiet voice. "But a clear vision isn't always the most enviable thing on earth."

And so she went downstairs to spend that day in weary labour, whilst heart and brain cried out for rest.

And Mab lay in her little chamber, alternately thinking and counting the rose-buds on the wall, feeling herself a very badly-treated young lady indeed.

In the evening she met Gerard by appointment, and bore him this message from Elaine,—

"If it is for your best happiness that you should marry Mab I will try to be content; and the only favour I can beg of you is, that you will let me see your face no more so long as my unhappy love lasts."

By the close of the week both Gerard and Mab had left Claremont, and Carey Vaurenian felt he might once again visit the cottage.

He found Elaine looking very pale and much older. Her voice was listless and her manner languid, but she seemed pleased to see him.

As he took one small hand in his, and looked into her eyes, the love that had burned so long and steadily in his heart made him faint with its excess, but his bearing gave no sign of emotion, and his tones were calm.

"I have been a stranger to the cottage lately;

but now you will let me resume my ancient privileges!" he said, and she answered,—

"Why not? There is no one to be jealous now," and smiled ever so faintly. "We shall all be glad to welcome you here again."

"Elaine," and his deep voice was stirred with pain for her pain, "if I try to tell you how my heart aches for you my words will convey but a poor idea to your mind—"

"I know—I know!" she interrupted; "you have always been most good to me—have always made my troubles yours, and in all my days I have made you no return. Now, Mr. Vaurenian teach me to live down this grief—show me how a life if spoiled need not be wasted."

"No words or teaching of mine can make that truth plainer to you than now it is, and I can only say would to Heaven I could look back upon such a record of kindness and self-sacrifice as you!"

She sighed as she listened to his grave voice. Perhaps the thought stirred in her heart that she had been a happier woman if she could have loved him to forgetfulness of Gerard Massey; and, perhaps, in Carey's heart there lingered a hope that she would yet turn to him.

Did not Jacob serve fourteen years for his beautiful Rachel—and why should he complain, who, as yet, had served but six?

All Claremont was agog with the news of the broken engagement, and Elaine was compelled to bear much questioning as best she could.

Whose was the fault—his or hers? Their names were the topic for lively conversation at all social gatherings; but nothing definite could be learned until an announcement of a marriage in high life in every fashionable paper startled the gossip, and filled them with sincere pity "for that poor Elaine Norris, who certainly deserved a better fate than to be jilted."

We understand that a marriage has been arranged between Mr. Gerard Massey, formerly of Bombay, and son of Captain Massey, of the 6th Hussars, and Miss Mabel Norris, daughter of the late Rev. Vivian Norris, of Claremont, and granddaughter of Lady Millington. The ceremony will take place in November."

So died Elaine's hopes. And after the first bitterness of the blow had passed she rallied again, and filled her life, as formerly, with really hard work.

Of all she had toiled for none remained to her, and of those she loved two alone were faithful—Ismay Lake and Carey Vaurenian.

Truly, life did not seem desirable to have or to keep; and if at times she faltered in the way, and grew afraid of the desolate future, there was small wonder.

She was so bruised—so stricken; and it seemed to her in those days she could never rise above her grief, or be glad any more.

She counted the days as they passed—each one bringing Gerard's marriage nearer, and she would cry to her heart that she should go mad with her love and despair. But the dark cloud had a silver lining, and brighter, happier days were in store for her.

The time would come when she would almost smile at her then present grief; and finding safe shelter in a good man's love, wonder why she had so long been blind to his nobility—why she had made herself an idol of common clay, and, falling down before it, worshipped it so well and truly. But as yet the way was rough and dark, and her soul fainted with knowledge of the long conflict before it.

Mab was very proud and very happy. She had secured an eligible party, thereby pleasing Mrs. Fountney greatly, and she really was as fond of Gerard as her nature permitted her to be of any but her own sweet self.

She had met with no reproach from her aunt, but rather commendation. Indeed, that lady frankly owned to the future bridegroom that she was so delighted with the alliance that she should give Mab a dowry of a thousand pounds.

Gerard was as passionate and jealous a lover as any girl could desire, even the most exacting, and in her own set it was not known that he had been Elaine's betrothed.

So everything was bright for the thoughtless,

heartless girl ; there was no thorn in her rose, no cloud in her sky ; and congratulations poured in from every side.

Swiftly September and October passed, and her trousseau was well-nigh completed.

Mab's pretty head was turned with her success, and she could only think of pleasures and luxuries to come ; of the new and beautiful home preparing for her, and nothing of her duties as wife and companion.

At last the wedding morning came, sunny and warm, although it was mid-November, and Mab, arrayed in all her bridal finery, promised " to love, honour and obey " the man beside her.

The words fell glibly from her lips, and no thought of the lonely woman at Claremont came to mar her triumph. Truly it is well to be born heartless and thoughtless.

Two days after Elaine received the cards " with Mr. and Mrs. Massey's compliments," which told her that a chapter in her life was closed, and a new one began. Ah ! what would it be ?

Carey was with her when she took out the highly-embossed cards with the silver love-knot, and his face wore an expression of pain for her.

Leaning forward, he touched her hand.

" My dear," he said, and paused.

She looked up at him with a faint smile, and made answer, —

" Don't fear for me, the worst is over now," and when he had gone she unlocked her desk and took out all the little souvenirs of the past. She had no right to them now, for Gerard was another woman's husband, and throughout all time he could be nothing to her.

They were not many, those little remembrances of dead days, but they were inexpressibly dear to her, and her eyes filled with tears as she looked on them.

There were a few short notes written by Gerard in the very early days of their love—a few faded pansies (she remembered the words he had said when he gave them to her), a withered rose from which all fragrance had gone, a lock of hair, and a poor photo, a libel on his handsome face ; last of all a poem, crude enough to excite a smile in others, but deep and tender to her, because he had written it.

Why will women keep those dreadful trifles to recall old loves, old hopes, old dreams, and wake into fresh life the anguish that has so long neither moved nor cried out to them of the irrevocable past ?

With gentle hand, and lips that quivered despite her passionate effort for self-control, Elaine lifted these treasures one by one, and after kissing them, let them flutter into the fire, watching with sorrowful eyes as they slowly burned. She destroyed the portrait last.

It seemed to her she could not give that up ; but then she thought of Mab, and her expression resolved into firmness ; only as it fell among the bright flames she could not watch its destruction. She walked to the window and looked out, beating her fingers absently upon the panes, and knitting her brows as if in deep thought. After awhile she turned again towards the fire ; all that remained of her past was a few ashes.

" It is over and done with now," she thought, " and I must teach myself to forget him. He belongs to another woman, and so my love would be a sin." She locked her desk and going upstairs dressed herself for walking. " I wonder," she said in her heart, as she paced the dreary room, " I wonder if all men are as false as he ? If it is so, oh ! then Heaven help the women ! "

She spoke no more to any of her past ; the faint colour came back to her sweet face, and if her eyes looked often weary, what matter ! No one heeded this save Carey, and he only showed his sympathy by deeds ; of Gerard and Mab he said nothing.

And the autumn and winter passed. Spring with her manifold blossoms came and went ; summer brightened and glorified the whole earth, and still Elaine toiled on, spending her small savings for Fred, who had got into a fast set, and seemed irreclaimable. She did not murmur against her lot, and as she said, " her life was too busy for useless repinings."

If she had forgotten Gerard no one knew, no one dared ask ; all that was known of her was

her patience and goodness, all that was felt for her was love bordering on worship.

Mab never wrote, never showed by any sign that she remembered her childhood's home, or her childhood's protector. She lived in a gay atmosphere, and was rapidly becoming a leader of fashion. She spent no hour at home that could be spent out, and her husband grew weary occasionally of the ceaseless whirl of pleasure ; and although he would not confess it even to his own heart, he realised that she had no depth of character, no force of will, and that all her accomplishments were superficial.

But he loved her, and she had pretty, coaxing ways when she chose, which beguiled him into granting her all she wished almost before she had proffered her request.

Still his married life fell very far short of his expectations, but as yet he excused Mab to himself, and defended her saying, —

" She is so young ; as she grows older things will be different."

CHAPTER VI.

MAB had been married eighteen months, and in all that time Elaine had received no letter from her. The pain of her niece's ingratitude and forgetfulness had grown less, and striving bravely day by day she had succeeded in conquering her own unhappy love, which had survived Gerard's anger, absence, and in short, all save his marriage.

Imay, now almost sixteen, was anxiously waiting her parents' return to England. Colonel Lake had got his pension, and intended spending the remainder of his life in his native country.

It was a lovely June evening, and Imay had gone to the Hall ; Elaine, indisposed for walking, remained at home, busy on an elaborate piece of embroidery. As she sat there, bathed in the warm light of the setting sun, her thoughts went sadly back to old days, and she sighed as she thought her youth was gone and she must prepare to go down the hill alone.

Thirty seemed to her a great age—such a long, long remove from twenty ; ah ! she had been fair and beloved then. Now half her beauty was gone, and she had no lover. Gerard was false, and Carey's heart estranged because of her persistent coldness, so she thought as she sat alone ; because since Mab's marriage Mr. Van-renau had neither spoken nor shown his love.

" Oh ! " with a swift pang, " was it wrong and foolish to deny him all ? am I sorry now ? am I sure I do not regret casting away the substance for the shadow ? I miss his old tenderness which I have learned too late to value."

Then she quietly resumed her work, a troubled look on her fair face. The window was open, and through it there came to her all sweet scents and sounds ; from the road there was wafted the echo of a child's light laughter, among the bushes the birds yet sang ; she heard, too, the lowing of oxen in the distant meadow, the shouts of the boys as they played in an adjoining close ; but another sound reached her ear—that of a woman's swift, light tread on the gravel path, and looking up hastily she saw Mab.

She was so surprised that at first she did not move, but after a pause, she started up and met her niece in the hall.

Mab flung her arms about Elaine's neck, sobbing wildly ; the latter, drawing her into the room, shut the door, then asked, —

" What has happened, Mab ? "

" I have come home to you ; there was no one else I could go to. Auntie, I have left my house, run away from him," and then sobbed stayed any further speech.

Elaine held the girl from her, and looked searchingly into her tear-stained face.

" Why have you done this ? What has happened, and why have you left your husband, Mab ? "

She made her sit down, and then said, quietly, —

" You must tell me all, that I may be the better able to advise you."

Then followed incoherent words and bitter sobs, and all Elaine could understand was that

Mab " would never, never go home again," that Gerard had been " very cruel to her, and she was not to blame."

" My child," gravely, " I think there must be faults on both sides ; but try to tell me your story calmly. I think you know I shall not deal harshly with you."

So Mab, who was rapidly growing frightened at her own conduct and the false step she had taken, told with many tears how for some time Gerard had seemed averse to leading such a gay existence himself, or allowing her to do so either. He had grown jealous, too, of the attentions of a man named Lorton. There was really no need (as Mab said truly) ; perhaps she had been a little thoughtless, but, of course, she loved her husband very dearly, and he should have been assured of that.

" Lately," she went on, " he has been so terribly exacting, and watches me as a cat watches a mouse or a bird ; that made me angry, and I would not change my line of conduct to gratify his whims. He began to say cruel things to me, and, of course, I wouldn't submit tamely to his insults, and I told him it was a pity he had ever married me as he seemed dissatisfied with me, and he had far better have been true to his first love. That put him into a violent passion ; but it wasn't until last night anything seriously wrong occurred between us. I had been dining out, and he refused to go. I was not very well during the evening, and determined to leave before my carriage came. Mr. Lorton escorted me home, and no sooner had I entered than Gerard began a fearful tirade upon my conduct, telling me I was making my name a byword and a reproach to him. I was furious (as any woman would be), and this morning I waited only until he had gone out, then, not stopping to pack anything, came straight away here. Auntie, I'm very miserable. I haven't been good to you, I know, but you won't refuse me shelter ! " clinging about her.

Elaine unclasped the girl's arms from round her neck.

" Sit down, Mab, until I have spoken to you, and try to remember that whatever I say is prompted by my desire to see your happiness really established. Your running away from husband and home is the worst thing you have done or could do. It will give the gossip good foundation for many a vile story—a wife who leaves her husband, after having given him cause for jealousy, lays herself open to the cruellest suspicions. And even by your own showing you have acted foolishly throughout. Why, if Gerard desires a little quiet, a little rest from this ceaseless round of pleasure, cannot you deny yourself for one evening ? Do you think his wishes are never to be consulted ? "

" Oh ! " Mab said, petulantly, " of course you will take up the cudgels in his defence. You love him."

Elaine's sweet face flushed, and one moment her eyes flashed angrily ; but she said, quietly still, —

" Yes, once I loved him ; but on the day on which he married you I renounced my love, and held myself absolved from every promise I had given him. Another woman's husband—scornfully—" could have no charm for me ; and if, Mab, you will not listen patiently to me I give up your case at once. Remember, that if I have borne insolence uncomplainingly before I shall not do so now."

She ceased, and Mab said, miserably, —

" Forgive me, auntie ; I am so wretched. I don't know what I say, and I really did not mean to insult you. I promise to listen quietly."

" Very well. Besides your love of pleasure outside your own home you have given Gerard great cause for anger in allowing marked attention from any man ; a wife cannot be too careful of her husband's honour or her own dignity. I do not suppose for an instant that you thought of the harm you were doing, and you had no woman near to warn you ; but you should have remembered that Gerard is the safest guardian and adviser you can have. Please Heaven, Mab, it is not too late to make reparation. You must return at once to him before the news of your flight has spread."

But Mab cried out, desperately, —

"I dare not go back! Oh auntie, he will never forgive me—he will never believe I love him, or—or am sorry. I wish I were dead! Oh, I wish I were dead!"

A gentle scorn stirred Elaine's heart at the sight of Mab's pitiable weakness, and her repentance that seemed so unlikely to work any good; but her voice was almost tender when she spoke again.

"You have brought this trouble upon your self, child, and none but you can repair the mischief. I will take you back to town."

But Mab cried out the more.

"Indeed—indeed, I dare not go; Gerard's anger will kill me! He will never take me back again, or forgive me this scandal."

"If we go at once there need be no scandal. Oh, for your mother's sake, Mab, don't let pride or fear spoil all your future life."

She knelt by the sobbing girl, and wound her arms about her waist.

"My dear, he loves you, and 'love is kind,' ready to forgive all wrongs. In pity for yourself and for him, go back; as yet none can know of your flight. So far your name is safe."

The weak, foolish little thing was weary of her sobbing, her resistance, and she really loved Gerard as much as it was in her nature to love any creature, and she knew she had been wrong, that her present distress was of her own working.

She looked, too, round the pretty, inexpensively-furnished room, and missing the luxuriance of her own home, thought she could not bear to lose them, or live the humdrum existence of Elaine did. So, with a sob, she drooped her head upon her companion's shoulder, and said in a childish way,—

"Take me home; I will do and say all you wish. Indeed, I will be good if only he will forgive me."

Elaine kissed her, all old resentment being gone, and feeling a great pity for the weak butterfly creature who, out of all her friends, had chosen her to help her in her need.

"I knew," Mab said, "you would not reold or turn me away. I couldn't think of any one who would receive me kindly but you, auntie; I'm ashamed of my forgetfulness of you—in future we will be the best of friends."

But although Elaine answered, "Yes, dear," she had no faith in this sudden remorse and affection; she knew Mab's nature far too well now to be deceived by any transient feeling. She rose from her knees. The girl asked,—

"Where are you going? Oh, pray—pray don't leave me! Don't let Dorcas come to me, she will say such bitter things."

"No one will be unkind to you here," gravely. "Now you must let me go. I must get a Bradshaw, and see by what train we had best travel."

In a few moments she returned.

"There is only the mail left us to-night, and you are too weary to do the journey. To-morrow, however, we can leave Claremont at 9.30 P.M. Now, I am going to send Dorcas to the station with a telegram."

Mab made no further protest, or indeed any remark; but lay quite silent on the couch, whilst Elaine wrote her message to Gerard.

"M— is with me. We leave here to-morrow by the 9.30 train—will come straight on to yours."

Then Dorcas entered. Ever since Mab's treacherous conduct towards Elaine she had been bitter against her, and now she guessed the young wife was in trouble through some fault of her own, so she said, austerily,—

"Good-evening, Mrs. Massey. You've put Miss Elaine about a good deal, and next time you want to come it would be as well to send a message. Where's your husband? I guess he has too much grace to show himself here."

Mab began to cry again, whilst Elaine said,—

"Dorcas! Dorcas! I can't allow this."

"Oh, very well, miss," sharply; "but if I were some folks I shouldn't have impudence enough to step inside this house."

With which parting shot she took the paper from the table and stalked out, muttering to

herself as she went; but Elaine soothed the unhappy girl as best she could.

Mab was so wretched, so subdued, so helpless, that she would not allow Elaine to leave her that night; so they shared the pretty room that had once been Mab's.

Early in the morning they rose and began preparations for the journey. They met Carey Vanrenan on their way to the station, and he offered his services, which Elaine declined; he then asked when she would return, and she answered certainly not later than the following day.

All the way to town Mab sat silent in a corner of the carriage, only clasping Elaine's hand tightly; and when at last the journey was ended, and they walked through the busy streets, the latter had great difficulty in persuading her companion to return to her home.

She was half dead with fright when they entered the hall, and the servant looked curiously at her, but Elaine demanded quietly to see Gerard, and was told he was in the library.

Leaving the frightened, weeping Mab in an ante-room, she went in and faced her recreant lover; he started at her entrance, and rose in confusion. Her composure was a striking contrast to his agitation.

"You received my message!" frankly extending her hand. "I have brought Mab back to you—very penitent, very miserable, and determined, if you will forgive her, not to cause you any further anxiety."

His face darkened.

"Neither she nor I deserve any kindness or consideration from you. I think you are less than angel."

She interrupted him gently.

"I did not come to talk of the past or listen to compliments, but in the character of mediator. Gerard, remember she is very young and thoughtless."

"I have reasoned with her often," coldly. "I have not been a hard or exacting husband; but she has chosen to view me in that light; and having shown herself weary of my control by this last act, I agree with her that we are far, far best apart."

"There you err. She loves you, and is truly sorry for all that has gone. Oh, think before you condemn her, and expose your miserable quarrel to the world. She is only a child, and very weak."

"Women younger than she are wives, and keep their husband's names free from suspicion of scandal. No, Elaine; I am willing to grant you anything but this request, because I owe you some recompense," flushing dusky at the memory of his treachery. "Ask me anything but this."

"I will take nothing else," firmly. "It is the first favour I have ever asked of you, and I will not go until you grant it. I would not wish to blame you even in seeming, or call to mind one act of yours to shame you; but as you justly have said, you owe me recompense—yes, for eight wasted years—eight years out of a lifetime. If, indeed, you are regretful—if, indeed, you would prove your repentance, why, then, give me what I ask. Oh!" catching his arm as he moved to and fro agitatedly. "Listen to me. Mab was so early left an orphan, and it may be my training fell far short of what was necessary for her; perhaps I was not wise or firm enough for my task; perhaps her life was so quiet, so monotonous, that this sudden plunge into gaiety has proved too great for her mental balance. In a fit of childish passion she left her home. Did you never err through some sudden impulse?—are you so perfect (I speak for your good, Gerard) that you can afford to judge her so severely?"

His face showed signs of relenting, and she went on eagerly, seeing that.

"Oh, friend! for the sake of old dead days, when my will was your pleasure, when nothing seemed too hard for you so that it won me to you—for the sake of the grief I have suffered, forgive Mab. Have you thought what life will be to her if you put her away? The curious glances men and women will cast on you, the malicious things they will say of you; the coldness and scorn with which they will treat your child-wife! Would you spoil your own life—for the sake of

your pride—and hers, that has scarcely yet begun? She bears your name; it should therefore be dearer to you. Her dishonour will be yours, and no years of repentance and atonement will teach the world forgetfulness of such a scandal as you will rouse. Gerard, forgive her!"

He took her small, trembling hands in his.

"You prevail with me," he said, in a strangely shaken voice; "and I love her. I promise I will never reproach her with the past; that I will endeavour to understand her moods, and share them. Where is she? Poor child—how wretched she must have been!"

Elaine loosed her hands from his clasp.

"You have answered as I hoped and prayed you would. Now I will bring her to you. Be very gentle with her, Gerard—she is but a weak child."

She passed out into the little ante-room, where Mab sat trembling and crying pitifully.

"Come," she said, "your husband has forgiven you."

She took the young wife by the hand, and drew her into Gerard's presence. One moment Mab stood shrinking and afraid; then a voice broke the silence.

"Won't you speak to me, dear?" and running towards him, she threw her arms about his neck, sobbing out she had been very wicked and foolish.

Elaine quietly went out, closing the door behind her.

When the reunited pair were sufficiently calm to remember her, they sought her, and begged she would stay with them; but she negatived all their entreaties firmly and gently.

"I am happiest at home," she said; and the next day saw her once more installed at the Cottage.

Elaine had been home a week when Carey Vanrenan came to her with the news that he intended taking a trip to India.

"I shall probably be absent about two years," he said. "I think of making my home with the Lakes (the colonel has elected to remain for that period) and returning with them. There is nothing for me to do here; I am weary of the inactivity, and no one will miss me but Ismay."

"You wrong your friends," Elaine said, a strange sinking at her heart; "there are many who will regret your departure—"

He interrupted almost angrily,—

"That the many will regret me is a matter of small consequence, so long as the few remain untouched by my absence. I beg your pardon, Elaine," seeing the shadow on her face; "I ought not to have spoken so, and I suppose I should feel flattered if what you say is true. But I am tired of Claremont, of England, of old associations. I shall leave everything in Bailey's care; no man ever had a more honest steward than he, and he will do his duty to my tenants. I have no fear on that score."

"You will enjoy your journey," she said, shrinking into the shadow, "and return so bronzed and changed we shall fail to recognise you. Mrs. Lake will be glad indeed to have you with her."

"Yes, of course, I shall return laden with spoils. What shall I bring you, Elaine?" laughing somewhat bitterly. "A shawl, a fan, or a Bengal tiger for a pet and a plaything!"

"I want nothing," almost coldly, "but if you are generously disposed make Ismay the recipient of your gifts; shawls, fans, and Indian toys would be all acceptable to a young girl."

"What is the matter with you, Elaine?" he questioned amazedly; "has anyone offended you? have I?"

"No," quickly, "I am not offended; why should you suppose such a thing, Mr. Vanrenan?"

"Because your voice sounds strange, and you look unlike the Elaine Norris I know."

"Or thought you knew," with the nearest approach to flippancy he had ever heard in her tones. "For once you see me in my true colours; don't you appreciate the change?" and her smile was weary. There was a harassed look in her beautiful eyes, and he said gently,

"You are not well."

She shook her pretty head.

"You are very good so readily to excuse my

petulance. Believe me I am sorry to have spoken as I did, it was unjust to you who have always been so kind. I think I am not as even tempered as I used to be." She rose and laid aside her work, and stood looking from the window. "I wonder," she said, "what changes will have taken place when you return, and if we shall all be here to meet you, or some of us dead, and so quiet at last?"

There was a look in her eyes he did not understand, so he answered, quickly, —

"We will not speak of removal by death; and, after all, Elaine, two years will soon pass, and I shall be back before you have time to miss me or even wish my return," and shortly after he took his leave.

He was unfeignedly weary of his present existence and the hopeless waiting for Elaine's love. He wanted to get away from England and her, because, whilst so near her, the longing was always upon him to tell his passion, and an irresistible power drew him to her side.

He was blind to the signs of a new feeling in her, and he had not sufficient vanity to believe he should ever win her hand. He had waited so long that faith had turned to doubt, and hope to despair. So he set about his preparations, unaware that when he alluded to his coming departure he wrung Elaine's heart with many a pang.

"Oh!" she would say to herself, "if I had only recognised his true worth, and my love earlier. But now—but now, weary of rebuffs and waiting, all his passion for me has died out, and he is glad to leave me."

Her days were heavy with pain, her nights sleepless or distressed by cruel dreams; and always in her soul she cried out miserably for the gift she had so often and persistently refused, and which she now believed would never again be offered her.

(Continued on page 211.)

DIANA'S DIAMONDS.

—:— CHAPTER XXXVII.

At nine o'clock, or rather at five minutes to nine the next morning, behold me at the railway station, clad as much unlike myself as possible, my heart in my mouth, my hands cold and numbing, my head as it were on fire. I was dressed in a new Newmarket coat, unknown as yet to any of my acquaintances; and I wore a plain little bonnet, a very thick black veil, coming down to my upper lip, and I carried in my hand a small bag, which I held in a vice-like clutch, for did it not contain my diamonds! On leaving home I had said to Harris, in a would-be off-hand manner: — "Oh, Harris! if Mrs. Rose, or anyone calls, you can say I have gone out for the morning, and that I may not be in to lunch." Very sure was I that I would not be home for that meal! At the terminus I met Ralph, who was waiting for me, with an exceedingly grave face, and our tickets in his hand.

"Come along, Diana!" he said; "there is not much time to spare, and I have engaged a carriage to ourselves, so we shall not be bothered by strangers. I was glad he had had the forethought to do this. He also had bought quite a pile of picture papers and magazines; and I took my seat with a sense of relief that so far it was so good. We had not been seen by a soul that knew us; but I was not so well pleased to overhear the guard remonstrating with the ticket-collector as follows: —

"No! that's an engaged carriage; above him in somewhere else, they don't want no company, I guess. Don't you see they are a bride and bridegroom!"

I was scarlet. I scarcely dared look at Ralph. When I ventured to glance at him we were well out in the country, speeding merrily along past farms and fields. From Ralph's impassive expression I laid the flattery to my soul that the guard's remark had not reached his ears.

We were not long in reaching London. At Waterloo we chartered a hansom, and drove off that busy thoroughfare in which Gold and Onyx's establishment is situated. Bag in hand I descended, and walked into their magnificent shop, packed with variegated marble, surrounded by glass cases, containing exquisite specimens of their craft; cases well guarded by the light eyes of several haughty-looking young men. They eyed us, and doubtless thought we were a married couple, or a couple about to be married, desirous of investing in silver plate or jewellery. The business—the hateful business of making known my errand—was taken off my hands by Ralph. He whispered a word or two to one of the assistants, who bowed, and led the way down a carpeted passage, and into a luxuriously furnished back-room, lit from the top by a vast skylight. Here, one elderly gentleman, with very keen eyes, was seated at a table, examining some stones under a microscope, and the very Jewish-looking traders were eagerly superintending the performance. They all three looked up at us as we were shown in, and the young man, our conductor, said,—

"A gentleman and lady, to dispose of diamonds, Mr. Gold," and then disappeared.

"Ah!" said Mr. Gold, rising and bowing, and offering me a chair. "Diamonds are rather a drug in the market just now. These African diamond fields have reduced the value of the stones enormously, and placed diamonds within the reach of almost everyone nowadays."

"True," argued Ralph, politely; "small stones, but fine ones I fancy still hold their own."

"Fine stones! I mean flawless, and of a good colour," glancing at those on a piece of velvet before him, "always command a certain marketable value; but money is scarce. Times are bad, and buyers are rare. This lady, I presume, wishes to dispose of her diamonds?" said Mr. Gold, glancing sharply at me.

"Yes; or if that is not practicable to raise money on them," returned Ralph.

At this Mr. Gold raised his eyebrows very expressively, and his companions exchanged a glance of open amusement.

Decidedly their expectations of the value of my jewels were of strictly moderate dimensions.

"Perhaps the lady would allow us to see the stones?"

"Certainly," I mumbled, as I hastily fumbled at my bag.

"Are they Brazilian or African?" he inquired. "Stars, earrings, brooches?"

"No," I returned, still wrestling with the lock. "The diamonds are Indian. The ornament I wish to sell is a necklace."

"Oh, a revire!"

"You shall see it immediately," I responded, now pulling out my parcel of chamois leather and silver paper. "And if you would kindly remove those stones from the piece of velvet I will lay it on it, and you will be better able to judge of its effect."

The conviction that I was about to open their eyes gave me a certain amount of courage.

Alas! it was the last triumph my precious necklace was ever likely to afford me. As I unrolled it I thought of the murmurs, the whispers, the wide-eyed admiration, that had surrounded me as it flashed upon my neck.

I deftly unwrapped it, and with a quick movement laid the dazzling object on the strip of velvet, well under the light. It sparkled, it blazed—the stones seemed, as it were, to run into each other, and make one blinding band of light.

For fully as long as you could count thirty there was dead silence. Then one of the German Jews, thrown off his professional balance for once in his life, loudly ejaculated,—

"Gott in Himmel!"

"This is the most—most—" stammered Mr. Gold, "extraordinary—a—a—a—article—I have seen—for—a—for a considerable time."

"It is not extraordinary," said Ralph, coolly. "It is absolutely unique. It is, as you are aware, I am sure, matchless!"

The three professionals sat and stared. Then Mr. Gold drew it towards him, and began to ex-

amine it more closely, having once more put the microscope to his eye. For a long time he said nothing; at length he pushed it towards the oldest and fattest of his companions, and turning to me said,—

"A very old ornament, in miserable condition!"

"You allude to the setting!" said Ralph. "Yes, it is about four or five hundred years of age!"

"And the stones are cut in the most barbarous Oriental fashion," continued Mr. Gold, now warming to his work, and proceeding to make little of a parure that had literally taken away his breath.

"I know nothing of lapidary work," said Ralph. "But this I do know, that the necklace was the property of Indian princes, and is enormously valuable. Even my unprofessional eye can see that!"

"The centre stone I admit is of astonishing brilliancy," pointing as he spoke to the Evil Eye, which seemed to wink back at his finger with a fierce lurid flash.

"Eh, Herr Schammel! what do you think of that white diamond?"

Herr Schammel muttered something in German, which, of course, I did not understand.

"And," continued Mr. Gold, addressing himself to Ralph. "May I ask, sir, what is your idea of the value of these diamonds at a rough guess?"

"At a rough guess—fifteen thousand pounds at least," returned Ralph, without hesitation.

Mr. Gold laughed good-humouredly and said,—

"My dear sir, if you were to take ten thousand off that sum you would be nearer the mark!"

"Will you pledge your professional reputation on that opinion?" asked Ralph.

With an air of surprise Mr. Gold looked uneasy; glanced at Herr Schammel and his companions, and said,—

"At such a cursory glance I could not say anything that would bind me in such a manner, but this I may say at once, that you very much overrate their marketable value!"

"Yet I was told by a good judge that their worth was nearer twenty than fifteen thousand pounds!" I put in rather indignantly, for this beating down, in the face of the sensation that the diamonds had at first made on these experienced judges, made me angry.

"Ah, my good young lady," said Mr. Gold, softly. "That was some flattery. Nothing pleases a lady more than to have her jewels appraised at double their value. Your friend was not thinking of being a purchaser. There is a great difference between admiring an article and buying it."

"Will you and these gentlemen carefully examine the necklace, and give us your opinion of its value? We will leave it here and return in an hour's time," said Ralph. "That is, if it suits you!"

"Yess, yess,!" said Herr Schammel, eagerly. "That is one good plan. Come back in an hour and we will do business—we will examine and consult, and let you know."

"Very well," acquiesced Ralph, taking his hat.

Mr. Gold rose and opened the door in a most courtly manner for me to pass out. Undoubtedly a lady who owned such diamonds was fully entitled to respect.

"What shall we do for an hour?" said Ralph, looking at his watch. "Take a turn at the Royal Exhibition of Water Colours and then have lunch, or shall we charter a hansom to the park and sit there under the trees?"

I voted for the pictures, they would be more private than the park, where we would run the risk of meeting mutual acquaintances who might be up for the day like ourselves.

Indeed, in the gallery I recognized two South sea faces, and only fervently trusted that they did not recognize my figure. My face I defied them to see.

After half-an-hour's cursory inspection of the pictures we adjourned to a fashionable luncheon place, where we sat at a little round marble table

and I was regaled by Ralph's command with a bowl of strong soup, and he had a sandwich and a glass of beer.

Many other people were lunching at the same time, some seated in couples, some solitary, some in quantities.

We were rather near the door, and commanded a view of the street and all passers-by.

As Ralph and I sat *vis-à-vis* we conversed in low tones about the necklace.

"He is a sharp hand, that Gold," said my cousin; "but if he thinks we are going to let him have the necklace for a song he is mistaken. When we return do you remain in the shop, and I will do the bargaining. I will tell him that we are not pressed to sell it."

"Oh, Ralph, but we are!"

"Well, if the worst comes to the worst, I myself will advance six thousand on it. I would gladly give you the money right out. Nothing I should like more, but I spend every shilling of my income. The park and the yacht swallow it down wholesale, and I, like yourself, cannot touch a penny of my capital. However, I can raise six thousand on a mortgage."

"Never for me, Ralph! I would not take it."

"No; but your mother would. She is not so sensitive."

"Why should you pay her debts? With me it is different."

"Well, I hope after this that you will have done with her and her money matters. At any rate, you will be out of her way if Hugh's regiment goes to Ireland."

"Ralph!" I gasped. "There is Hugh—he and another officer have just gone past. And oh! what am I to do? They have stopped and turned, and they are actually coming in here!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

My words were scarcely out of my mouth when the door swung open, and Hugh and a man I had never seen before strolled in, and went up to the frizzy-haired young lady at the counter and ordered refreshments.

It was to supply the wants of the stranger that they had called in, for I knew that Hugh never ate lunch, saying that he considered it "an insult to his breakfast, and an injury to his dinner."

As Hugh was not eating he had ample time to look about him, and his eye fell on a friend at the next table but one to ours, who loudly hailed him, saying,—

"Hullo, Halford! What are you doing up in the village?"

"Only up for a couple of hours' business at the Horse Guards."

"Quarried at Portsmouth now, ain't you?"

"Yes; but I'm at this confounded camp of exercise just now."

"Oh, yes! By the way, now you are a married man you are not as keen for these impromptu affairs as you were! I hear that Mrs. H. is the belle of Southsea, and that her diamonds make your eyes water! You fell on your legs, old chappie. Has she any sisters? I'm in the market still, you know!"

"And likely to be there," returned Hugh, with a grin. "I could not honestly recommend you to any girl, Crawford; you are too hard in the mouth for double harness."

"A case of the pot abusing the kettle! I should not answer for your domestic harness, splashboard, and splinterbar if you happened to get an unexpected cut."

Such, for instance, I said to myself, as his discovering me that moment.

He took no notice of this sally. He had caught sight of Ralph and me—me merely as Ralph's veiled companion.

"Hullo, Torpichen!" he exclaimed, as Ralph stood, and placed himself well between us. "When did you come up to town?"

"This morning."

"Seen anything of my—of Diana?"

"Yes; I saw her yesterday driving with Mr. Rose."

"Oh! Well, I hope to get home in a day or two."

Then he looked very hard at me, glanced significantly at Ralph, with a scornful, satirical expression in his eye, as much as to say "Ah, ah! old man, I have found you out!"

Then he nodded carelessly to my companion, joined his friend, who took his arm, and walked him away, and as they went Hugh, I know, said something—something about Ralph and his lady friend, which delighted and tickled the other, and then they both left arm-in-arm, laughing.

I felt furious with Hugh. Querry, would he have been so amusing if he had known that the veiled lady was his own wife?

"A narrow squeak!" ejaculated Ralph, drawing a long breath, and wiping his forehead with his handkerchief.

As for me I had no nerve for these kind of scenes, no heart for dancing on volcanoes. I was so unshinged that I was obliged to remove my veil, which was suffocating me, and to ask for a glass of water.

After I had recovered my self-command we once more sailed forth to Gold and Onyx, which was not many yards distant.

As we entered I saw that every eye was fixed on me—undisputedly the fame of my diamonds had been noted through the establishment.

I did not repair to the private sanctum, as previously. According to his wish Ralph went alone, and I sat in the shop and waited, and looked at the contents of the glass case beside me, and wished myself safe at home in my own drawing room.

Ralph was away an hour. He told me afterwards that they had had a tremendously tough struggle—he single-handed against four others, for Mr. Onyx had joined the party.

Vainly they had talked, argued, and expounded, and backed one another's opinion.

Ralph was inflexible. Six thousand pounds or he took the necklace elsewhere; they were only losing time.

He triumphed in the end, and I was sent for, and requested to sign a receipt for a cheque for six thousand pounds paid on account of a diamond necklace by Messrs. Gold and Onyx.

The cheque was on Count's Bank, and it was too late to cash it that day. I received it languidly—a miserable little strip of paper in exchange for my beloved diamonds, which Mr. Gold now swept up with a fat, white, greedy hand! And I signed a receipt, "Diana Halford," in rather trembling characters.

There was something else to sign—a regular prim-looking written agreement, which set forth these facts, that "if Mrs. Diana Halford did not redeem her diamond necklace within the space of twelve months it was to be the sole property of William Gold, James Onyx, and Hermann Schammel on a further payment of six thousand pounds, and meanwhile Mrs. Diana Halford was to undertake to pay ten per cent. interest quarterly on six thousand pounds already advanced to her."

This I also signed in a still more shaky hand. Little did I guess that those two signatures were, so to speak, two big nails hammered into my own coffin.

Now that the bargain was clinched Messrs. Gold and Co. permitted their professional attitude to relax, and broke forth into unmeasured praises of the Begum's necklace.

Such stones had not been in the market within their memory. The central pendant was supreme, and must surely be an historical jewel. Could I favour them with any information?

I told them all that was in my power. How that the age of the necklace was unknown; how and where it had been found; how it was regarded with great superstition; and how the stone that they supposed to be historical was known as the "Evil Eye."

As I said this it seemed to emit an angry flash at me, as Mr. Gold held it up rapturously against his coat. Perhaps it was threatening me for thus pawning it, and promising to punish me in some way. Who knows?

"There is sufficient material for four necklaces," said Herr Schammel, impressively.

"The stones are massed and muddled up in the most extravagant fashion. If you don't redeem the necklace we shall break it up, and distribute the stones. The Emperor of Russia has an agent looking out for some really fine diamonds, and I know of other purchasers from America and Australia."

It was evident that Mr. Schammel was pleased with the bargain. Ralph took charge of the cheque, and I resumed my empty bag, and we withdrew, followed to the shop entrance by our four companions.

Having no time to lose we drove off at once to Waterloo, and I reached home without any misadventure by six o'clock in the evening. I was worn out by the long, exciting day, and my head ached as it had never ached before. I told Harris that I required no dinner, and went up to my room, undressed, and swallowed a cup of tea.

After this I went to bed, and laid my weary head on my pillow, having placed the cheque for six thousand pounds carefully beneath it.

Next day Lady Lorraine's maid came to see me after breakfast with a verbal message from her mistress.

"Her ladyship's compliments, and if I had been able to do her little commission would I meet her at the circulating library at four o'clock," to which I replied,—

"Please say yes to both questions to your mistress."

Toianette was, no doubt, well used to similar little mysterious errands, and went away smiling.

"And so you have managed it beautifully," whispered Lady Lorraine that afternoon, as we stood before a big book-case together, ostensibly looking for novels. "You are a darling!" she added, as I placed an envelope in her hand, which she instantly tore open, and critically inspected its contents. "It's all right, I see; it's on Coutts. Here," holding out a book, "is the very thing to suit you, and when you have read it give it to Captain Halford to peruse. It may do him good. It's called 'The Jealous Husband.' There is a little note between the leaves intended only for your own eyes."

So saying she thrust the volume into my hand, and walked away.

Well, at any rate I had done my duty, and no one expects to be thanked for that; but when I thought of my poor pawned necklace, of the terrible risks I had run with Hugh for her sake, I did think—yes, with tears smarting in my eyes—I did think she would have seemed a little grateful. She had not even said thank you!

"After all," said an inward voice, "she is your mother, and your service to her is but her right."

"Well, I had done all I could. No more she knew, was in my power, and having accomplished my duty I might, I hoped, look for my reward in peace at home.

I regarded it as a good augury that when I drove up to our house the door was opened by Hugh himself, who seemed delighted to see me, and now that there was a load off my mind, that debt it was mutual.

We went up to the drawing-room and had tea, and as I sipped mine, and he stood looking at me, with his cup and saucer in his hand, he said,—

"You are looking wretchedly ill, Kance! What is the matter with you?"

"Nothing. I've had rather a headache the last few days."

"Probably because you stay indoors too much. Were you out yesterday?"

"I should rather think I had been out yesterday; but I merely muttered a monosyllabic assent.

"If you are going to lose your roses I must call in the doctor. Do you know that a fellow told me yesterday that he heard that Mrs. Halford was the belle of Southsea!"

"Yes, I know. Had I not heard him with my own ears?"

I nodded and coloured. Poor Hugh, he took my blush for modesty. He never dreamt that

my colour was the blush of fear and shame. He said,—

"There, now, you are as red as a peony. I wish that pretty pink would stay in your cheeks. Why should you blush! You know very well that you are out-and-out the prettiest girl in Southsea!"

"Girl!" I echoed. "I feel as if I were fifty!"

"Oh, do you! Wait till you are fifty, and you will feel rather different. You, perhaps, will like to imagine you are twenty, like some mature dams, such as your friend Lady Lorraine! Rance, have you kept your promise about her?" he added, suddenly, as it were transfixing me with his steady, dark eyes.

"Yes," I replied, looking into the teapot.

"You have not entered her house since I went away?"

"No."

"Nor has she been in this?"

"No."

"Nor have you written to her?"

"No."

"That's a good girl," stooping over, and brushing my blushing cheek with his moustache; "and you will find that your virtue will have its reward." (Oh, would it!) "I am glad to see that you can keep your word, and are to be trusted. I have taken the most inveterate dislike to that woman, with her smiles and her airs of assumption, and her fine dresses and her fascinating ways. I would almost as soon see you associating with a bad case of smallpox. Her mind is poisonous, and would contaminate yours, my little wild jungle flower. I know her history, and it is not a good one. No wonder she never refers to its bad pages."

I also knew her history. Was it not all written out on thin sheets of paper, and looked away in my dressing-case upstairs! So I sat silent and played with the fringes of the tea-cloth, and looked, as I felt, wretchedly uncomfortable.

"Well," said Hugh, after a pause. "I think I'll have time to go down to barracks before dinner, and see some of the fellows, and pick up the news, and I shall probably bring Jack Hare back with me."

Jack was our frequent guest; he and I had buried the past, and the memory of a certain scene one moonlight night.

"I always had an idea that you had a soft spot for Halford," he said, very coolly one day. "And I know he was desperately spoony on you. But then, I believed he would not ask you, as you had money, and he had not a rap."

"At least you were not deterred by the same scruples," I said sharply.

"Oh!" with a laugh. "I'm a different sort of fellow. I am not a bit proud, and he is as proud as Lucifer. He must have been desperately fond of you to marry you, and swallow his sensitiveness. For once I heard him say, and it stuck in my mind at the time, that marrying a woman for her money was very much like setting a rat-trap, and baiting it with your own finger!"

In spite of various little passages-at-arms Jack and I were very good friends.

He often made a third at our table, joined our rides, or squeezed into the front seat of the Victoria. To-night he returned with Hugh, bolling over with news and spirits, and he and Hugh vied with one another in jokes and stories, and witty retorts.

As for me I was dull and silent. I had not yet recovered from my expedition to town, nor the fright Hugh had given me. Presently Jack said something that caused me to prick up my ears.

"I suppose you have not heard that we settled at the mess meeting yesterday that we are bound to give a big ball before we leave for Ireland? The people here have been awfully civil, and we have only given a few afternoon dances, and cricket luncheons; so we have decided to give a ball that will take the shine out of every one that has been given here for years. Something more than a nine-days' wonder. Supper from town, and a special train for guests. We must put our best foot foremost!"

"Yes, we will," said Hugh. "And Rance,

you must write over to Paris and order a stunning frock from Madame what's-her-name!"

"Yes," argued Jack. "And I shall take leave to present your bouquet, provided, for the credit of the regiment you will promise to wear your diamonds! Eh, will you promise?" eyeing me eagerly.

"Yes, Rance," chimed in Hugh. "I am, as you know, generally against their display; they look so startling on the neck of what Selina contemptuously calls 'the wife of a captain in marching regiment'! Nevertheless, on such an occasion as a big regimental ball, we are all bound to put our best foot foremost. Say, my love, I quite endorse Jack's request on this forthcoming festive reunion. Mrs. Halford, by special desire, will wear her diamond necklace!"

"Well, she?"

I said nothing intelligible. I smiled a faint assent, and I became cold all over. Here was a contingency for which I was wholly unprepared.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

WHAT agonies of mind I suffered before that ball took place! How was I to account for the absence of my diamonds? So much for being the owner of remarkable jewels!

If I did not wear them they would be missed, and what was I to say? I watched (at an afternoon dance on board the guardship) a hurried parley with my mother when Hugh was not looking—my mother, the most admired of all holders, as usual.

Her rather impatient reply to my whispered entreaty was,—

"Oh, brazen it out! What a little fool you must be! He will believe whatever you say, thanks to your artless eyes. Tell him anything. Tell him the clasp is broken. Tell him whatever you like."

"Yes; but I cannot always say that the clasp is broken," I whispered, appealingly. "Do help me!"

But already her head was turned in the opposite direction, already she was conversing gaily with a good-looking, clean-shaven post-captain, and I must only get out of my dilemma as best I could—and alone.

The clasp excuse answered for once. When I came tripping downstairs in a cloud of sea-green tulle, satin coral and seaweed, Hugh exclaimed in admiration—

"But," he added, as I stood under the full glare of the gas in the dining-room, "where are the diamonds?"

"They would not go with this dress," I answered, pale to the lips.

"No! Why, I would have thought they would have gone with anything, and you are always so keen about wearing them. Run away, and put them on. You won't be a minute, and you know you promised Jack!"

"Yes; but then I had not seen my dress," I answered promptly. "Alas! how readily I was adapting myself to the art of telling lies! 'You see, it is a sea costume!'"

"Do you mean a bathing dress?"

"Well, that's the only kind of sea costume that I have ever heard of."

"I mean a dress that typifies the ocean. Look here, at the green tulle and satin, the tulle draped with seaweed, coral, and even shells! Is it not novel and lovely?"

"Lovely!" looking at me. "Oh, yes, I grant you that; but why not the diamonds?"

"Don't you see that would be out of place! They do not come from the sea. Now, pearls do, and this sweet little string of seed pearls is the very thing, and it matches my pearl bracelets and pearl rings in my hair."

"Sham!" he exclaimed, contemptuously.

"Yes; sham!"

"Well, even if they are a little out of keeping, I would rather have real diamonds than mock pearls any day."

"No doubt," and now hard pressed, I fell back on my other excuse; "but the clasp of the diamond necklace is out of order."

"Oh! why did you not say so at first? You

remind me of a fellow who was held up before the colonel for not attending as member of a garrison court-martial, and who gave his reasons for absence as follows:—'Firstly, because I was feeling indisposed; secondly, because of the inclemency of the weather; thirdly, because it entirely escaped my memory!'"

I laughed heartily at this little illustration—laughed quite naturally—and led the way to the brougham, declaring that, even as it was, we—considering we were joint host and hostess with various others—were disgracefully late.

Everyone was at the ball that was anyone. Troops of guests came from the Isle of Wight and from London, and among the latter Aunt Halford and Selina, the former all velvet and old point and smiles; the latter in pink satin, and an execrable temper. My costume put her out. She eyed it up and down as she talked to me.

"That gown of yours must have cost a pretty penny—forty pounds at least!" she burst out at last.

"I do not know—the bill has not come in yet; but I do not think it will be so much."

"Forty pounds each for gowns will soon make a fine hole in eighteen hundred a-year."

"So they would; but Hugh wished me to look well, and told me to order a pretty frock." I answered, apologetically.

"Oh, indeed!" sniffling. "And then, in that case, why did you not wear your remarkable diamonds?"

"They would not correspond with the costume," I answered, now turning away.

The ball was crowded, and very successful. All the officers did their duty well as hosts. Ralph was there. He looked distinguished, spite of his waiter-like black coat—distinguished and young.

He asked me to dance, and I complied, and after a few turns we strolled away, and sat in a little frequented tea-room.

I wanted to talk to him, and to thank him, for I had never seen him since our joint expedition, and he had evidently something to say to me; so we sat on the same ottoman, our heads close together, our faces concealed by my big sea-green satin fan, and I rapidly told him how I made over the cheque, how Hugh had questioned me closely about Lady Lorraine, and what desperate straits I had been put to to account to Hugh for the curious freak of wearing a string of mock pearls instead of my lovely real diamonds. I related every word that had passed between us in the dining-room, not forgetting the little anecdote which concluded the conversation, and at which Ralph laughed immoderately.

"But it is no laughing matter, all the same," he added, gravely. "I have a kind of hideous presentiment, Diana, that little trip of ours about your necklace, or else the necklace itself, will get us into some scrape yet."

He gazed at me earnestly, and I looked back at him.

"If the worst comes to the worst you can sacrifice me. I have broad shoulders, and can bear the brunt of the row better than you can."

"No, no, dear Ralph!" I said, placing my gloved hand on his arm. "I shall never allow you to suffer for me; I will bear it all."

"Perhaps you will not have a voice in the matter! Perhaps—," and he stopped suddenly. I followed his glance, and soon discovered Hugh at the buffet, ostensibly waiting upon a stout old chaperon, but in reality watching us with eyes of angry incredulity.

"Come!" I said, rising abruptly. "We will hope for the best. I must ask you to take me back to the ball-room, as I am engaged for the next dance."

I danced it with Jack Hare, who was a capital partner; and as we paused now and then to take breath and watch the other people, he teased me unmercifully, and upbraided me for not wearing my diamonds.

"You promised, you know, and you have broken your word. You did not even deign to wear my bouquet!"

"I did not deserve it," I answered lightly. "It would have been accepting a reward under false pretences; besides, I could not wear hothouse flowers when I have seaweed in my dress!"



"THERE IS AN OLD LADY HERE WHO IS WEARING YOUR DIAMOND NECKLACE!" RALPH HAD WHISPERED INTO MY EAR.

"No! and a very pretty dress it is—heaps of people say so. You and Halford are a creditable-looking couple, and certainly raise the average good looks of the corps. But why! oh, why! did you not sport the diamonds! They reflect a borrowed light on every one in the regiment. If a captain's wife can wear fifteen thousand pounds round her neck, what can the major's and colonial's wife do! It makes a nice kind of rule of three sum. Who are you going to dance the next dance with? With Halford! Oh, I say! that's absurd!"

"Why is it absurd? Does it follow that because we are married we must never dance together?"

"Yes; you get enough of one and another, considering that you are partners for life. Halford, here! I make you over Mrs. Halford in due form. I think it is very greedy of you to dance with her, and this is a divine waltz! 'Bid me good-bye!' You might let me have it, like a good fellow!"

"No, certainly not! Why should I!"

"I have just been telling her that she is an ornament to the room; but all the same, I'll never forgive her for not wearing her diamonds!"

My diamonds! my diamonds! was I never to hear the end of them! As we swam round and round to the strains of 'Bid me good-bye,' I glanced about over Hugh's shoulder, and took in a crowd of faces watching the dancers. My mother, who understood the full effect of a tardy arrival, stood aloof, exquisitely dressed, the centre of a little knot of satellites. I fancied that her eyes followed us languidly; indeed, I may say without conceit that a good many people watched us—and why not!

Hugh was the best dancer in the room; and I, if I was nothing else, was the best-dressed young woman at the ball. Was it imagination, or, as I floated by, did I really hear one spectator whisper to another,—

"I wonder she is not wearing her diamonds to-night!"

We stopped a few minutes, and leant against the wall; at least I did, and fanned myself

vigorously. Then I glanced at Hugh. Scarlet became him; he always looked well in uniform, especially in his mess dress. But as his eyes met mine they did not smile, and I knew at once by their expression that he was about to make some disagreeable remark.

"Diana" (he always called me Diana when he was angry), "I am sorry to see that you have developed a taste for flirtation. You were flirting with your cousin this evening. I saw you, and one word is as good as twenty—I won't stand it!"

"Then you will have to sit it," I answered pertly.

"Nonsense! I am not joking. You had your hand on his arm, and were looking up in his face as if—as if—" stopping.

"As if what? Out with it," I exclaimed, angrily.

Who would have believed that Captain and Mrs. Halford as they leant against the wall, in a most public position in the ball-room—"and such a handsome couple!" as I heard an old lady remark—were carrying on a battle royal?

"As if you were fond of him. I'm ashamed to say it!"

"And I am not. I am fond of him!"

"Diana!"

"Yes, as my friend and cousin!"

"I do not permit my wife to have any friend of my own sex besides myself!"

"Oh, indeed!" I replied, with a scornful toss of my head. "I suppose I must for the future cut Mr. Parish and Jack Hare—that is, if you expect me to obey you!"

"Which I certainly do! But you are quite on a different footing with Jack and Mr. Parish to what you are with Ralph Torpichen, and when you talk of the three in the same breath you talk nonsense, and you know it!"

"Diana," said a voice on my other side. I turned quickly, there was Ralph! Had he heard? Most probably he had, for he was looking graver than ever. "Can I speak to you for a second? Something very important."

"Yes, of course you can, for a hundred seconds—if you like," I rejoined, for Hugh's special benefit. "Is it anything very important?" holding up my fan playfully, as if to make a screen before us.

"Well—yes—it is rather," bending his head towards me, and speaking in a low and hurried voice.

"I thought I would tell you," he concluded, as he drew himself once more erect, and quietly moved away.

The face that I exhibited when I moved my fan must have been chalky white. I felt beads of perspiration already standing on my forehead. Even Hugh was startled out of his wrath at my ghastly appearance.

"What is the matter, Rance? Are you ill? Come away out of this hot room. What has made you look like this? What has that fellow been telling you? Now, I insist on knowing!"

I shook my head, and faltered out,—

"Nothing! I am giddy, and the room is stifling!"

Was it likely that I could repeat what had been whispered into my horrified ear?

"There is an old lady here in the outer sitting-room, looks like a Jewess—husband rich financier. She is wearing your diamond necklace!"

I felt as if I was going to faint. I tottered into the first ante-room, and managed to reach the door of the second, sending Hugh for a glass of iced water. Then I glanced timidly around, where chaperones were bunched in dozens; and yes, there, near the door, sat an enormously stout old lady in a gorgeous velvet gown—cut rather low in front; and sure enough on her throat I recognised my late necklace—a necklace that no one who had once seen it could ever mistake. I fancied, too, that there was an unusually vivid flash from the Evil Eye as it met mine.

(To be continued.)



"EUNICE—MY WIFE!" ALEC CRIED; "HEAVEN HAS SENT YOU BACK TO ME AT LAST."

UNA'S VOW.

—10—

CHAPTER XXXI

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

AWAY in England the interest in what was called the "Oakenhurst Murder" was dying down. Weeks passed into months and yet no arrests were made, and no new light was thrown on the matter. The public soon wearies of a romance in which fresh details are lacking, especially when other and fresher romances are cropping up every day in the newspapers, and so people began to forget the fate of the beautiful Countess, whose tragic end had made such a sensation, and whose murderer had not yet been brought to justice.

A few there were who still kept up an unflagging interest, Inspector Rowley being one; but even he was beginning to lose hope, for somehow the clue that he followed so eagerly had slipped through his fingers, and that thousand pounds looked farther off than ever.

Sheldon had escaped from England without being traced, and the charred remains of the letters he had bought from Melanie Coote had told nothing, except that they contained declarations of undying love towards Lady Carstairs, and Mrs. Redwood was still too ill to give evidence.

As for Mrs. Alec Beresford, she had vanished as completely as snow in the sunshine, without leaving a single trace behind her.

Rowley's own opinion was that she was dead, and sometimes Alec felt inclined to agree with it. But this was only when he was in an unusually desponding mood; as a rule he felt not only convinced that his wife was alive, but that she would come back when her innocence could be proved.

Meanwhile he continued to live at Oakenhurst, although Lady Rosaline, trying vainly to bridge over the gulf between them, wrote him piteous letters from different watering places, begging

him to join her. All her entreaties were in vain. He was determined to stay on in the home that had been Eunice's, and to carry out all the plans he and she had projected in the early days of their married life.

To do this seemed to be making some amends to the young wife whom Fate had treated so cruelly.

And so time slipped away. Christmas passed, and the New Year came in. It had been a sad enough Christmas for poor Alec, weighed down as he was by memories and reproaches. Oh! if he could only live these last twelve months over again!

He was sitting in the dining-room after his solitary dinner. Dessert was on the table, and the flames of the pine logs on the hearth were flashed back in ruddy sparkles from the silver dishes and cut glass decanters.

Alec's cigar had gone out, and as he leaned his head on his hand there was such a depression in his attitude that the dog by his side sat up on his haunches and whined dismaly.

Outside the night was rough and stormy. The wind crashed through the trees, sending great boughs whirling down on the grass, and moaned through the chimneys as if it were in mortal agony. The ivy, broken loose from its supports, tapped against the window panes, now softly, now with more insistence, as if there were unhappy spirits outside seeking to be let in.

Hush! What was that? Alec started to his feet, and the collie growled angrily. That imperative knocking on the glass could never have been caused by the ivy—it must surely have been made by living, human fingers.

The young man hastily crossed the room, and pulled back the curtains, which, however, had only been partially drawn, so that a view of the interior of the apartment could be obtained by anyone outside. The window was a French one, and, without a moment's hesitation, he threw it open wide.

"Who is there?" he exclaimed, loudly. "Who was it knocked?"

There was a pause of a few instants, and then Alec's heart stood still for a minute, as a prelude to beating so loudly he was almost choked. A woman's form stepped out of the darkness of the winter night—a woman's form, wrapped in black garments, which were wet with rain, and bore stains of travel, and as she threw back the heavy veil that had covered her face Alec knew that his hope was fulfilled, his prayers were answered.

"Eunice—my wife!" he cried, his voice hardly rising above an agitated whisper. "Heaven has sent you back to me, at last, at last!"

He drew her inside with tenderest care, he took her to the fireplace and placed her in the most luxurious arm chair, then he divested her of the soaking mantle, and threw off her hat so that the small pale face, with its wealth of dark hair, became visible—the face that was to him the sweetest in all the world!

She watched him in bewilderment, but submitted passively, even consenting to drink the glass of wine he poured out for her, whose generous warmth brought a faint glow of colour to her milk white cheeks, but when he sank on his knees by her side, and began tenderly chafing her ice cold hands, she uttered a little cry that might have meant joy or pain.

"You are not sorry I have come back then, Alec?"

"Sorry, my darling! I am more glad than I have ever been in my life—it is what I have been waiting and hoping for all these long, weary months, what I have been praying for as I never prayed for any boon before."

There was no doubt in his words, or their sincerity. Into the girl's eyes there came the light of a great hope; her lips trembled, for a moment she could not speak, indeed she did not wish to, for speech might have broken the spell of this delicious joy, which was beginning to steal through her veins like some subtle elixir.

Alec bent his head over her hands and kissed them; they were warm now and tingling.

"I have so much to say to you, Una, so much to ask forgiveness for," he began.

"Hush!" she exclaimed. "Don't say that; you hurt me. There can be no question of forgiveness between you and me. Oh, if I had known you would receive me like this I should not have waited outside in the rain, afraid to come in, afraid to face you."

"Why should you be afraid?"

"I did not know but what you might think I had run away because I killed poor Lady Carstairs."

A red flush leapt to Alec's brow as he remembered that once he had believed this to be the case. Well, he would be honest, and confess it.

"There was a time when I did think so, Una," he returned, gravely; "but now it seems to me utterly impossible. Still, I have often wondered why you left Oakenhurst as you did, at that precise time. Will you tell me?"

She put her hands to her throat with the old gesture he knew so well, and which with her always betokened mental agitation.

Still, she faced him bravely enough, and in a low voice explained the motive of her flight.

"It was for the sake of your happiness," she said, as she finished, "and if Lady Carstairs had lived, I should never have come back to England, but her death made a difference, and the more I thought over the matter, the more convinced I became that it was my duty to return and see if I could not clear myself. I did not forget," she added, in a lower tone, "that I bore your name, and that so long as this charge hung over me it was stained."

And so it was for his sake she had gone away—for the sake of fulfilling an old vow made in her childhood, that his happiness should always stand first. Verily, a woman's love, when it is true, is far above rubies!

He got up and went to the window, looking out into the wild darkness of the night to hide the emotion he could not otherwise conceal.

When he came back he resumed his former place, on his knees, at her feet.

"I also have a confession to make, and it is very different to yours, Una, for mine is one of selfish blindness that would not see the value of your devotion. It was only when you left me, and when my uncle's letter telling me that you were the little girl I had cared for so many years ago, helped me to understand your true character, that I found out how all unconsciously you had twined yourself round my heart—in a word, how I loved you."

"You loved me, Alec—loved me!" she cried, almost wildly, starting to her feet.

He rose, too, and they stood face to face.

"But," she said, bewilderedly, "I thought it was Lady Carstairs you cared for."

"So I did once, but when she married the earl she dealt a blow at my affection, which it could not withstand—or perhaps at my vanity, if you like to put it in that way."

"The result is the same. When, after our marriage she came down here, I think you will acquit me of seeking her society—it was thrust upon me."

"I acknowledge that I still admired her beauty, but even then I thought it hard and cold—in effect, even then, my heart belonged to you, though I myself did not know it."

"But my blindness has passed away now, and I know that life holds nothing worth having if you do not share it with me."

"Ah! Una—wife—beloved—shall we blot out the past and begin over again—shall we see if the future will not redeem it? For I offer you a love that is the deepest and truest of which I am capable. I offer you a heart that holds no other image but yours!"

He held out his arms, and in another minute she was clasped to his breast.

And for those two, in those first few moments of divine communion, love did indeed take up the glass of time, turning it in his glowing hands till—

"Every moment, lightly shaken, ran itself in golden sands."

Presently, when they grew a little calmer, Alec very naturally wanted to know where his wife

had been during all the time they had been searching for her.

It was a long story, but Una condensed it as much as she could, passing over all unimportant details, and confining herself to the main points—how she had been taken by Steve Hardy to the old house by the river; how she had escaped and made acquaintance with Mr. Sheldon, their subsequent voyage together, and his death resulting from the wound he had received.

Then she came to her own landing in South America. She told of the horrible sense of loneliness that pursued her night and day, and the hourly strengthening of her conviction that she ought to come back, until, unable to bear it any longer, she took a return passage, and landed in England yesterday.

The point in her narrative that struck Alec most was Sheldon's revelation of Colonel Beresford's marriage with his deserted wife.

It threw a flood of light on his uncle's behaviour, and quite explained both the terms of his will, and the letter he had written to Alec.

The "secret" alluded to in that letter was doubtless the fact of the marriage being a false one, in consequence of poor Leonie's first husband being still alive; but there could be no doubt that the old officer had long been aware that Una was his own daughter.

"It is like a romance," the young man said, "and like a romance it should end happily. But I will not let myself think of any other ending. I will only remember that I have you back, and that no matter what the future may be, the present is, at least, perfect."

He put his arms round her and drew her once more to his breast, then, holding her a little way off, he looked into her face with the ardent passion of a lover.

"Darling, how pale and thin you are! We must nurse the roses back to those white cheeks, and bring the laughter back to your lips. Oh, Una! I ask for nothing better than to devote all my life to your service!"

She bent forward and kissed him—the first kiss she had ever given him. A delicious ecstasy stirred them both—no wonder that they forgot the dark abyss on whose edge their feet were standing.

They were recalled to the prosaic realities of everyday life by a knock at the door, which was almost immediately afterwards opened, to admit the figure of no less a person than Inspector Rowley, whose first impulse, as he saw the tableau before him, was to discreetly withdraw; but at that moment Una, whose head had been turned away from him, looked round, and he saw her face.

A change came over his own. He advanced a few steps into the room, carefully closing the door behind him.

"You haven't forgotten, sir, our arrangement for me to see you to-night?" he said, quietly, while Alec, who had been on the point of telling him to go about his business, looked rather crestfallen.

"No, I haven't forgotten," he returned, "but I should be glad to postpone our interview. Your news of Mrs. Redwood can wait till the morning."

The man's eyebrows raised themselves in a very significant manner.

"Mrs. Redwood's illness can wait, sir, perhaps; but there are other things that can't."

"What do you mean?" Alec asked, startled. Rowley came to the table, and laid his hand upon it, while his eyes were still fixed on Una's pallid face.

"That lady is Mrs. Alec Beresford—your wife, if I don't make a mistake!"

"She is—what then?"

"Only this—that I still hold a warrant for her arrest. It was issued some months ago, but it has never been cancelled, and so it is as good now as on the day it is dated. Now, I don't want to do anything disagreeable—indeed, it's my earnest wish that no harm may befall the lady; but I'm an officer, and duty is duty. What-ever may happen in the future, the only thing I can do now is to place her under arrest."

A faint scream escaped Una's lips, but she stifled it instantly, though she drew a little

nearer her husband, who, with a protecting gesture, drew her arm through his. His face, too, was very white.

"You don't mean now, Rowley—at this very minute? Surely it can wait until the morning." The man shook his head. He was really sorry for what he was about to do, but it was his business, and if he failed he would be blamed for it by the authorities.

"I'm afraid not, sir." Then advancing to Una's side, he laid his hand on her shoulder. "Madam, it is my painful duty to arrest you on the charge of murdering Hilda, Countess of Carstairs. I warn you that anything you may say is liable to be used in evidence against you."

Una said nothing except very quietly, "I am innocent," and Alec, though the first wild idea was to resist, saw after a moment's reflection what a mistake it would be, and how prejudicial to his wife's case. No, the only thing was to submit quietly, and trust to Una's innocence being publicly established later on.

"All right, darling, keep up your spirits," he whispered, and she smiled bravely back.

And so it fell out half an hour later the brougham came round, and Una, Alec and Rowley were driven to the county jail, where poor Una spent the first night of her return to her native land.

CHAPTER XXXII. AND LAST.

AND so interest once more awoke in the Oakenhurst murder, and the newspapers were full of this new arrest, to which piquancy was added by the fact that leaked out of Mrs. Alec Beresford being the heiress of Geoffrey Sheldon, the great Australian millionaire, who was also in some vague way connected with the tragedy of Lady Carstairs' death.

Rowley was more than ever on the alert, for Una's sweet, pale face, and earnest manner when she declared her innocence had had their effect on him, and he confided to Alec his belief that the real murderer was still at large. Handsome rewards were offered for further information, detectives came down from London—Alec spared neither care nor expense in his endeavours to find out the truth, and while Una was in prison took apartments as close to the jail as possible, so that he might be near her, and able to see her as often as the authorities would allow. She had been brought up before the magistrates, and remanded. Of course they refused to allow bail, but they gave her every facility for seeing her husband, and it may be doubted whether Una had ever been so happy in her life before, in spite of the terrible accusation hanging over her. It seemed to her that nothing mattered much, so long as she was assured of her husband's love—and of that she could now have no doubt.

She had shown to Rowley Sheldon's account of what had happened in the wood on the night of Lady Carstairs' death. The reader will remember that Rowley had strongly suspected Sheldon himself of being the murderer, but that suspicion was now dispelled, for it was not likely that on his dying bed the man would have made a deliberate untrue statement. Moreover, his account dispelled the mystery of the duplicate pistol. Undoubtedly Lady Carstairs had been shot with the pistol found in the wood, and as clearly that weapon was one of the two Colonel Beresford had brought from Mexico with him. It had passed from his possession into that of Leonie Sheldon, and her husband had taken it from her and appropriated it to his own use. Sheldon said that after threatening the Countess he had thrown the weapon away—presumably loaded—and it followed that someone must have appeared almost directly after he left, and have made use of it, for the evidence had distinctly negatived the idea of the Countess having shot herself.

"And when he came back he was met by Melanie Coote, who was looking for her mistress," Rowley observed, thoughtfully, as he listened to Una's narrative. "I was right, then, in thinking that she knew more than she'd tell! We must see if we can hunt her up."

Although as many months had elapsed since

the murder he was by no means hopeless of clearing up the mystery surrounding it. The circle of suspected persons had narrowed very considerably.

Una, Mr. Sheldon, Alec himself was now outside it, and there only remained Mrs. Redwood and Melanie Coote. The former was still very ill, as indeed she had been ever since her first seizure at Oakenhurst. Alec, remembering her kindness to his bride when he first brought her home, had interested himself a good deal in the woman, and had had her conveyed to a Home where cases like hers were treated by a specialist. Rowley had never ceased trying to obtain an interview with her; but so far the doctors had not allowed it, saying the excitement might have an injurious effect on the patient.

"I am sure she knows something," the Inspector said to Alec, when they were talking matters over. "Why should she have disguised herself and gone to the Black Pool to throw away the other pistol and your wife's bodice, if she had nothing to do with the crime? I think the doctors ought to strain a point in our favour when so much depends on our getting at the truth."

Alec was of the same opinion, and set off that same day to see if he could not compass the interview—which, somewhat to his surprise, he was permitted to do.

Mrs. Redwood was still very ill, not yet out of bed, but her mind was clearer, and she was as anxious to see him as he was to see her.

She looked very pale and fragile, and strangely different from her old self, as she lay propped up by pillows; but there was still a certain delicate beauty in her face which told of the loveliness that must have been hers in the days of her youth.

Her first question was for her young mistress, and when Alec broke to her the news that Una was in prison, she hid her face in her hands, and he could see the slow tears trickling through her thin, white fingers.

"She is innocent," he added, very emphatically, "and I am here to-day because I want you to help me to prove it."

The woman raised her head eagerly.

"Only tell me how I can do so, sir, and you will see how willing I am," she returned. Then, with sudden fervour, she clasped her hands together. "Why I would give my own life to save her!"

Alec looked at her curiously. There was something in her tone and manner that puzzled him.

"You were fond of my wife!" he said, questioningly.

"I loved her more than anyone, or anything in the world," was the quiet reply, spoken in a way that left no doubt of its sincerity.

"Then tell me all you know of Lady Carstairs' death."

"I know nothing, sir; nothing at all."

"But were you not in the wood on the night she was shot?"

"No; that is, not until after she was dead."

"But why did you prevaricate with Inspector Rowley when he asked you about your mistress's movements?"

Her eyes fell, and her thin fingers began picking nervously at the bedclothes.

"You can speak quite openly," he added, "no harm can possibly come to my wife from anyone you may tell me."

"Well, then, I knew that my mistress had been to the woods, and I doubted whether she was back; so I tried my best to make the Inspector believe she was in her room; and even if she did not return to the house I thought it would give her time to escape."

The words came slowly and reluctantly from the woman's lips, as if they were forced from them against her will.

"Then you believed she had done this foul deed!" he asked, a little sternly, forgetting that he, too, had once believed it.

"Oh, Captain Beresford, I did not know what to think! I knew the poor child was madly jealous of Lady Carstairs; and under the influence of jealousy neither men nor women know what they do. I prayed that she might be proved innocent; but I feared—yes, I feared."

"And your reason for throwing the bodice of her dress and the pistol in the Black Pool!"

"It was in order that suspicion might not be strengthened against her. I went into the dressing-room before the Inspector did, and I saw the bodice of the gown she had worn that evening, all stained with blood, so I took it away and hid it; and then when I heard of the finding of the pistol I remembered I had seen her looking at one exactly like it, which she told me had been Colonel Beresford's, and which she kept in her desk. I thought if the police found it they would conclude the pair had belonged to her, so I determined to throw it away. I tried to escape observation by putting on your coat, for I knew the house was watched, and I was afraid of being followed. That is the truth, sir, and I call Heaven to witness it!"

"Then," said Alec, impressed in spite of himself by her solemn manner, "what you did you did on my wife's behalf, and with a view of saving her?"

"Yes, because I knew whatever she had done she was more sinned against than sinning," rejoined the woman with some spirit; "nothing should have induced me to tell you this if I did not see that you are anxious to save her. Poor child—poor, poor child!" she cried with a sudden burst of tenderness, and once more her fragile frame was shaken by sobs.

Alec placed a kindly hand on her shoulder.

"Mrs. Redwood, what is the origin of the interest you take in Una? Surely it is unusual, to say the least, if there is no tie between you."

Her sobs ceased; she looked at him with wide brilliant eyes full of a sort of terror.

"What tie could there be between us?" she muttered, uneasily.

"One that is the most sacred of all—the tie of mother and child."

She uttered a low cry, and shrank back as if he had struck her; nevertheless, for one brief second, a strange look of exultation passed over her face, increasing the likeness to that other face which Alec had grown to love so well. Ever since his entrance into the sick chamber he had been struck by the change in her, and her likeness to Una, which was partly due no doubt to the fact that she had discarded the wig and cap she had formerly worn; and each moment confirmed the idea that flashed upon him like an inspiration. This woman was the unfortunate wife of Geoffrey Sheldon.

She looked so pale and weak that in some alarm he fetched her a restorative. When she had taken it she revived somewhat, but she was still trembling, and seemed incapable of speech.

"You need not fear," Alec said, kindly, "your secret is safe with me. Mr. Sheldon is dead, so there is no danger of his claiming you now. You see I know the whole story, even to your marriage with my uncle, Colonel Beresford."

"Which was no marriage!" she exclaimed, with a flash of bitter resentment; then, conscious that she had betrayed herself, she fell back once more against her pillows, and remained silent for a few moments. When she spoke next it was with a feverish energy that told its own tale of weak nerves. "You will not let Una know—you will not let her even suspect the truth!"

"Why should she not?" he asked, gently.

"Because she would despise me—me, her mother, who cast her nameless on the world!" the woman cried with bitter anguish in her tone.

"She would not blame you—how could she? She already knows how cruelly you were treated, and as for your marriage with my uncle—it was valid in the sight of Heaven."

"Yes, but not in the sight of men. I made him swear, as soon as I knew the truth, that he should never betray it—that even if, in the future, he should come across the child, he would keep her from the knowledge that he was her father."

"And he kept his promise," Alec said, remembering the letter his uncle had written to him in which allusion was made to the promise.

Now that the ice was once broken, and there was no further reason for concealment, Mrs. Redwood spoke openly enough of her past—how she had escaped from the Lunatic Asylum, and tried to trace the child, finally coming to England in

search of her; how she had determined never to go back to Sheldon, and finally, how she had obtained a situation at Oakenhurst after the Colonel's death, feeling certain that the girl he had made his heiress was in reality his own daughter.

All this Alec listened to with absorbed interest; but, alas! it threw no light on the murder, except so far as Leonie herself was concerned, and when the young officer left her it was with a heavier heart than he had had ever since Una's arrest. He had counted greatly on this interview with Mrs. Redwood, believing she could give him valuable information; but his hopes had turned out illusions.

"Never mind, sir," Rowley said, consolingly, when he heard the result of the visit, "your talk with the housekeeper has had one effect—it has proved that she did not fire the shot that killed Lady Carstairs. Now all our hopes hang on Melanie Coote."

But information regarding Melanie Coote did not seem forthcoming. Rowley had tried vainly to find out by what steamer she had left England for America, and inquiries were being actively pursued on the other side of the Atlantic—so far without result.

She seemed to have disappeared completely, without leaving a trace behind her. And time was getting short now. The trial would soon be coming on, and unless fresh evidence turned up it was possible, nay probable, that Una would be convicted. Poor Alec was nearly maddened at this lack of success. Had he found his love only to lose her?

His efforts were unceasing. Night and day he was busy making inquiries, holding consultations with the solicitors, leaving no stone unturned in trying to prove his wife's innocence. Telegrams were constantly arriving from the various detectives engaged in the case, and Rowley ably seconded all their endeavours. He had always in view that thousand pounds which was to be his reward if he discovered the murderer, but sometimes he was very much afraid it would, after all, evade him.

Una, contrary to expectation, kept up her faith and her spirits, her chief anxiety seeming to be bestowed on her husband, who was growing daily paler and thinner with anxiety. And yet the knowledge that this was so was not without its consolation, for it proved that the dream of her life had come true—Alec's love was given to her in larger measure than she had even ventured to pray for.

Imperceptibly the time slipped by until the day before the trial arrived. Late in the afternoon the young man was taken to his wife's cell, to hold his last interview with her before she stood at the bar of the Court. The most skilful counsel had been engaged to represent her interests, and what money could do had already been done, and yet the lawyers themselves looked grave when they discussed to-morrow's chances, for they knew that the most eloquent speeches, and the keenest legal knowledge are alike useless when the jury have before them plain facts, all pointing to one conclusion.

Una's admitted jealousy of the murdered woman, and her flight directly after the deed had been done, were terribly against her, taken in conjunction with the blood-stained bodice, which it could be proved she had worn that evening, and the undoubted fact that she was in the vicinity of the wood at the time the crime was committed.

"I wish I could offer myself in your place, darling," Alec exclaimed with a groan, as he knelt beside his wife, with his head on her knees.

Her lip quivered a little as she placed her hand on the curly hair. Somehow that cry of his seemed to bring her peril before her in a stronger light, making her realise it more completely than she had done before, perhaps. And life was at its best just now, with youth, and love, and wealth to crown it.

"Don't let us think of to-morrow, Alec," she whispered back, "it can do no good, and it will only unnerve us both. Let us talk of the old days in the menagerie when you risked your life to

save the miserable little wif who has only brought address to you in return."

"Rather say who has taught me the true meaning of life, which is love," he answered, quickly; but he yielded himself to her fancy and there was something pathetic in the sight of the young couple sitting there in the squallid bareness of the prison cell, trying to forget the present in recalling those far off days of Una's childhood.

All too soon the time for parting came. How they clung together, her arms encased round his throat, his holding her close to his throbbing heart! There was a blurred mist before his eyes as he stumbled from the cell, and at first it prevented his seeing Rowley, who was waiting just beyond the great gates for him to come out.

"Good news, sir, at last!" he exclaimed, jubilantly. "We have waited patiently till the eleventh hour, and now I hope we are going to get our reward."

Alec looked up eagerly.

"You have found Melanie Coote?"

"Well, we are on her track. But let us come into your rooms, sir; we can talk better there than here."

Alec led the way, and then Rowley went on with his communication.

"It was a mystery to me," he said, "after all our inquiries how the girl could have left England without anyone noticing her. I know what you are going to say, Captain, and you've said it times enough before, that she was an insignificant little woman, whom nobody would take much notice of; but if you'd had my experience you'd know that it is almost impossible for anybody, no matter how insignificant, to be on board ship without attracting attention of some sort or another; you see people have absolutely nothing to do, so they spend their time in observing their fellow-passengers. Well, we couldn't trace her anyhow, but now it seems she never left England at all."

"Then she is in England at this moment?" exclaimed Alec, starting to his feet excitedly.

"You remember I told you she was going out to her lover in Manitoba? Well, it seems that before she could start she had a letter from him to say he was on his way home, and soon after he arrived they were married. The marriage wasn't a happy one; they quarrelled, and were jealous of each other. He knew she had money, but she would never tell him where she got it from, and he was suspicious in consequence, especially when he saw the advertisement in the papers, saying a reward would be paid for her whereabouts. Last week, as you know, the reward was increased to five hundred pounds, and I suppose the amount tempted him, especially as he and his wife had had a violent quarrel, which seems to have greatly incensed him against her. He says that he had overheard her talking in her sleep of Lady Carstairs' murder, and one day in a rage he accused her of having committed it. It was a random shot, but it told, and the woman confessed that it was true—she had fired the shot that killed Lady Carstairs."

The Inspector paused, but Alec did not speak; perhaps his relief was so great that words would not come.

"She says it was an accident," continued Rowley. "She went into the wood to look for her mistress—most likely to play the spy upon her—and just as she found her she saw the pistol Mr. Sheldon had thrown down, lying on the moss. She picked it up, and was going to give it to Lady Carstairs, when it went off and shot the lady dead. How true this account is I don't know, and whether it was an accident I don't know either; no one will know, probably, till the Judgment Day! Melanie Coote is a queer fish, and perhaps she had a spite against her mistress and wished to pay off old scores. However, that's neither here nor there. Her husband says that when he read in the paper that Mrs. Alec Beresford was to take her trial for the murder, and that it was likely she'd be convicted, he begged Melanie to own up, but she wouldn't, so at last he decided to tell what he knew to the police—and, at the same time, get the five hundred pounds! Of course, detectives were despatched at once from Scotland Yard, and Melanie, thinking the game was up, confessed that what her

husband said was true. But she hangs out about its being an accident, so I suppose she'll get off on that, as there is no other evidence against her."

And he was right in his conjecture, for at her trial Melanie was acquitted.

And now there is little more to tell, since, although Una Beresford stood in the dock to answer the charge brought against her, no one doubted what the issue of the trial would be; and her fearless declaration of innocence was followed by the verdict, "Not guilty."

The next day she went back to Oakenhurst—and it was, indeed, a "homecoming!" for all the tenants and workmen on the estate had turned out to give her a welcome, and the road to the house was spanned with triumphal arches, bearing messages of greeting.

The sympathy felt towards her was universal, and innumerable were the hearty good wishes that followed the young couple, as, after so many vicissitudes, they came back to their ancestral home, there to enjoy the calm following the storm that had so nearly wrecked their lives.

And, strangely enough, it was not till that evening that Una opened the sealed envelope given her by Sheldon just before he died. It contained two certificates, one of marriage and one of death. The former certified that Geoffrey Sheldon, bachelor, had married Inez Castro, spinster, in Lima, on the 30th July, 186—; the latter bore witness to the death of Inez Sheldon, nee Castro, ten years later.

At first Una did not understand the significance of these two dates, but Alec's trained eye saw at once what they meant.

"Don't you see, darling, that Sheldon's marriage with your mother took place after the first date, and before the second?" he said, as they stood together in Una's boudoir; "which means that the marriage with your mother was illegal, as he had a wife alive at the time!"

Una understood now, and her eyes sparkled.

"Then her marriage with your uncle was legal, after all, Alec?"

"Yes; and you had a right to the name of Beresford before I gave it you."

And so the crumpled rose-leaf was smoothed out, and Una could face the world fearlessly, knowing that no taint of shame rested on her parentage.

She had no difficulty in guessing Sheldon's motive for asking her to wait before opening the sealed envelope. He knew that Time is a great softener, and he trusted to it for helping Una to pardon the deception he had practised on poor Leonie. He had married the Spanish woman when he was quite a boy, and she had deserted him.

In the wild life he was leading such ties are looked on very lightly; and when he left Peru and came back to England when he decided that it need never trouble him, or make any difference to his future.

So now the *soi-disant* Mrs. Redwood has taken her place at Oakenhurst as Colonel Beresford's widow—greatly to the indignation of Lady Rosaline, who declares most vehemently that she will never recognise her right to the title!

However, this is not a matter of great consequence even to the gentle-faced invalid, who grows daily stronger under the influence of the happiness that falls like sunshine over Oakenhurst; where the music of little footsteps and baby laughter is heard in the fine old passages, and Alec Beresford's love for his wife grows deeper and deeper as the years go on.

And Una has never once had cause to regret her faithfulness to her Vow.

[THE END.]

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WHICH IS THE HEIRESS?

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CHAPTER LVIII.

BEATRICE's eyes dilated as she fixed them intently upon the young man standing before her, who had risen to offer Miss Daly and herself seats in that crowded car. She looked at him like one spellbound, with a strange light in her eyes; then there broke from her lips the stifled cry of a frightened soul; but he did not hear it.

After closely watching him for a brief instant, the girl turned abruptly away, and hurriedly whispering something to her companion, drew her veil down over her face.

She trembled violently, and dared not trust her voice to thank him. It was as though a dazzling light had shocked and blinded her, as though a thunderbolt from the blue skies had fallen at her feet.

"How like her; yet it cannot be one and the same," thought the young man, incredulously. "She had the same eyes of midnight hue; the same jet-black, arched brows; the same delicate profile; the same beautiful, passionate mouth; the same dark, glossy curls; even the dimple in her white, childish chin is the same," he added, passionately. "I ought to know. It is a remarkable resemblance. When I met her that eve by the gate, her beauty took me completely by surprise. I felt sorry for the nameless, friendless girl."

Beatrice drew the dark veil closely about her face. Had he recognised her? For a moment her senses seemed in a whirl.

Someone had given Miss Daly a seat, and for this the girl was very thankful. If it should transpire that this man was Donald Lindsay he would recognise Miss Daly at once. He had the same voice and the same face.

Her guilty soul trembled within her. The next instant she almost laughed aloud. Why, how mad she had been to fancy that this man could possibly be Donald Lindsay, the cripple from whom she had fled in such mortal terror!

At that moment the carriage gave a lurch forward, and a terrified, stifled scream broke from Beatrice's lips.

"Do not be alarmed, miss," said the man who sat beside her; "you have nothing to fear. I can understand the terror one feels when a train passes round a curve like that," he mused aloud, more to himself than to her. "It was just two years ago to-day that I received the shock which brought the greatest sorrow of my life."

"How—how was that?" asked the girl, in a strange voice, her great eagerness to hear the answer that would fall from his lips overpowering her reluctance to carry on a conversation with her fellow-passenger.

He roused himself from a sort of reverie, and answered, absently,—

"There are pages in the life-book of many a man that he never cares to turn back to, and the epoch in my life of which I speak is one of these."

"Pray do not answer if the question is a rude one," said Beatrice, quickly.

"I should like to speak about it," he answered. "It would relieve my troubled mind. I never for a moment thought that I should be able to step upon a train again; but one never knows what he can do until he is brought face to face with it. Two years ago to-day I was the happiest man the sun shone upon. I had so much to live for; the world was rosate with happiness. I was going on a journey, taking with me my bride."

He was so interested in his own story that he did not notice the gasp of terror that broke from the lips of the heavily-veiled young girl sitting beside him; but he went on, in deep agitation.

"The brightest sun may be overtaken all in a moment by a cloud. Mine was; but in that darkness my sun set for ever. I ran over to the station to buy a railway ticket, leaving my bride standing as fair and beautiful as a rose in June. As I looked back over my shoulder, I saw her standing there, with the glinting sunshine on her

lovely face, and that backward look was the cause of my undoing.

"I did not see a train sweeping down upon the station from an opposite direction. The only thing I remember was a terrible blow from the engine, a stinging pain in my knees, as if every bone in them were broken, and I knew no more. For long weeks I hovered between life and death. There happened to be some surgeons on the train returning from some convention. They decided to bring me to the hospital in the city, where the amputation which they had decided upon should take place.

"For weeks I lay unconscious, oblivious of the terrible pain I was enduring. It was the last of summer when I was placed on my bed of sickness. It was midwinter ere I realised my surroundings and what was taking place around me. By a miracle—yes, a miracle—the doctors succeeded in saving my limbs from amputation; otherwise I would have been a poor, helpless cripple, the most abject creature that ever lived upon the earth. Are you crying, miss? You must have a very tender heart to take such deep compassion in the narrative of an entire stranger."

She did not reply; she dared not trust herself to speak, to utter one word, lest her voice should betray her.

After a moment's pause, he said,—

"I made up my mind then never to step on a train again; but I am forced to do so. I go to and fro, from city to city, searching for one whom I expect some day to find. And then—"

He quite forgot that he was talking to someone else, and that person an entire stranger.

Looking, with parted lips, at him through her veil, she saw a strange look on his face—a mingling of bitterness, melancholy, and defiance. The voice was sharp and harsh, the words were fiercely spoken. He uttered them with knitted brows and a set look on his face.

His strong hands had clinched themselves together, and somehow Beatrice could not help feeling the power of those strong hands around her own white throat. They seemed to be choking her.

"Great Heavens!" she muttered, under her breath, "there is no doubt of his identity now. He is risen up like a wrath from out of the past to come between Wyndham Powis and the man I love. He is even now searching for me. I am like a stag brought to bay!"

Her one thought was to get out of the seat beside him before he discovered who she was. She heard the guard call out the station, and she realised that was where she was to stop.

Beatrice sprung away from her seat without one backward glance at the man from whom she had fled at the very altar, and who was searching the whole world over for her.

In her great haste she forgot and left behind her satchel, which had been lying on the seat beside her.

Donald Lindsay called out to her, but the shriek of the engine whistle drowned the sound of his voice.

As it was a station at which he intended to alight, he took up the satchel and hurried after the closely veiled girl. But to his great surprise, after stepping from the train the girl was nowhere in sight.

"She must have rejoined the train in the rear," he thought; "and now I am left with this on my hands. What am I to do about it?"

He looked helplessly, but the train was fast disappearing in the distance. His first impulse was to hand it over to the station-master; then it occurred to him that perhaps the wisest procedure would be to open it, find out the owner's name, and forward it on to her home.

If it contained any valuables, he would be responsible, as it had been found on the same seat which he had occupied, and he had left the car with it in his hands.

He could not possibly express it on before the next train came, which would be a few hours later, so he told himself that the best thing he could possibly do would be to go to the hotel, get a good supper and a little rest, and that would be time enough to give the matter his attention.

But during the palatable meal to which he sat

down his thoughts reverted constantly to the young girl who had so suddenly left the train.

Yes, the more he thought of her, the more impressed he became that he had seen some one before who looked like her.

He could not, try hard as he would, drive the subject from his mind. The thoughts which haunted him took away his appetite, and he rose with his meal untouched.

He went out into the grounds to enjoy his cigar, but the form of the girl on the train seemed to waft to and fro in the path before him. Suddenly he stopped short.

"Heavens!" he cried, "am I mad or dreaming, that such an idea should come to me? That young girl bears every resemblance to my long-lost, false, treacherous Beatrice, whom I have been searching the whole world over to find!"

He sat down on the garden bench, his knees trembling, the breath passing over his lips like a flame.

"If—it were Beatrice, she must have recognised me," he muttered.

Then it occurred to him how she had risen to her feet with a cry on her lips when he had narrated his story to her.

The contents of the little satchel would probably reveal to him whether he was correct in his surmise. It seemed to him that his limbs would scarcely bear his weight, he trembled so.

He would soon know the truth. The landlady spoke to him on the stairs. She received an unintelligible reply as he hurried past.

"What is the matter with the man?" muttered the landlady, looking after him in puzzled wonder. "He asked me if I would let him know if my little boy could take a satchel to the messenger office, and now, when I have climbed this pair of stairs to tell him, he rushes past me without so much as a word. If his face was not so pale, I should say that he was certainly a drinking man."

But looking neither to the right nor to the left, Donald Lindsay hurried with desperate resolve to his room, and caught up the little hand-satchel.

CHAPTER LIX.

With hands that trembled like aspen-leaves Donald Lindsay tore open the clasp. For a moment his eyes were so blinded by his strange emotion that everything seemed to swim before him.

He turned away, taking two or three strides up the length of the room. By degrees something like composure came to him, then again he turned to his self-imposed task.

At first he beheld but the usual contents of a young lady's satchel to be used on a journey—bottles, combs and brushes, smelling-salts, a few extra handkerchiefs, a needle and thread case, and a package of sweets.

He started at this, and his white face grew a shade paler.

Beatrice always had loved sweets. He used to tease her about it in the old days when they were lovers.

She had looked for them in his pockets every time he had called upon her.

He dived down farther, bringing up from the depths of the satchel a tiny card-case of pearl and gold.

There was a monogram on the outside, but he did not stop to decipher the intertwined letters, but opened it hurriedly, and drew forth a card with feverish anxiety. One glance, and a mighty cry broke from his lips. The name the card bore was "Beatrice Daly Pelham."

Donald Lindsay reeled to the nearest seat and sat down, holding up the card before him, his eyes fairly bulging from their sockets. He looked at it steadily.

The name seemed stamped on his brain in letters of fire—Beatrice Daly Pelham. He repeated the name to himself, and as he did so a cry of rage broke from his lips.

It was she, his wife, for whom he had been

searching the whole wide world over! She had

been seated so near him that he could have put out his hand and clutched her arm!

As soon as she had discovered his identity she fled from him. Imprecations both loud and deep burst from his lips. The very blood in his veins seemed turned to fire. He struck his hand against the table, crying out against woman-kind.

What did she mean by the name Pelham that was on the card? Had she dared to marry another? The very thought seemed to crass him. If there was another whom she loved, let her beware!

When his mind grew calmer he tried to reason the matter out. Yes, it must be that she had wedded another, and that was why he had been unable to find her.

With a great anguish, never in life to be forgotten, he clasped his hands, and great tears trickled down his cheeks.

He had loved her so! And the tears of man are more bitter than the tears of women.

"I have wept thus since the hour I lost her!" he cried, dashing the tears from his eyes, "and the tears have made great furrows in my face, and taken the light and brightness from my eyes. I have wept until my eyeballs were like two burning fires and the fountain of my tears was dried. I weep no more now. I shall never weep again. I shall start out into the world to find her. It is Beatrice Pelham for whom I must search, and not Beatrice Lindsay."

He thrust back into the little satchel the things he had taken out. Everything it contained was his—belonged to her, his wife. Then he said to himself that there might be some other clue in the satchel relating to her destination. His eyes fell upon a telegram which he had not noticed before. He open it hurriedly. To his surprise he found that it was dated from the very place in which he then was, and read as follows,—

"Do not come on, as I expect to be in the city in the course of a day or so.

"WYNDHAM—"

The rest of the name was torn off.

Again he sprang to his feet and paced up and down with the telegram in his hand, like one mad. He saw that it was dated only the day before. It was a small place, a village of scarcely more than hundred houses. The man who had sent that telegram was in the village. He would find him and learn for himself what he was to Beatrice.

First he would visit the telegraph office, and if he failed to find his address there he would search one house after another. He strode out of the hotel and down the village street, and the little children who passed him looked up in wonder, shrinking back in affright from the savage-faced stranger.

The young telegraph clerk was startled when the message with the corner torn off was laid before him and the grim stranger who handed it in at the window demanded to know the address of the person who sent him.

He was unable to inform him. He had only come to the village a few hours before, to take the place of the regular clerk, who had gone to take his vacation.

Donald Lindsay turned away with an angry curse on his lips, muttering that he would canvas the place, house after house, until he found the man he searched for.

There was no such word as defeat to a nature like his.

But to return to Beatrice. She had fled like one hotly pursued from the carriage in which Donald Lindsay was sitting, grasped Miss Daly by the arm, and hurried her quickly from the train.

"My dear," exclaimed that lady, "what is the meaning of all this undue haste?"

"Come quickly!" cried Beatrice. "I will explain later. A—a thief attempted to steal my purse. I think he must be following us."

That was enough to make Miss Daly dash from the car. If there was anything of which she had a horror it was that of pickpockets.

She was so flustered that it did not occur to her that Beatrice was fairly pushing her off the wrong side of the train.

A cab was standing there, waiting until the train moved on, so as to get to the other side of the station. Beatrice sprang into it, fairly dragging Miss Daly in after her.

"I will pay you your 'own price,'" she said to the boy, "if you will drive us at once to our destination."

Glancing back Beatrice noticed, with horror, Donald Lindsay step from the train with her little satchel in his hand. She saw it all in a moment. She had left it behind her, and he was following her out to place it in her hand. She could not remain another instant in his presence; it would drive her mad—ay, she would fall in a dead faint at his feet at another word from his lips, her fear of the consequences was so great. She said to herself, that if he did not see her, he would run into the station, leave the satchel there with the station master, and rejoin the train again. She would not go back to the station until the morrow, then she would be the more composed.

With the promise of double fare, the lad turned his horse about, and an instant later they were lost in a bend in the road. Then Beatrice breathed freely.

"How pale you look, my dear child," said Miss Daly. "You must have received a terrible fright. Why, where is the engagement ring Wyndham Powis placed upon your finger before he went away?"

"It is gone!" cried Beatrice, in an awful whisper. "I must have lost it—it must have slipped from my finger as I was hurrying from the station. I had it but a moment before."

"The thief must have grabbed it," cried Miss Daly, all in a flutter. "Let us drive quickly back to the station, and telegraph for the police to hold him!"

To her great amazement Beatrice shook her head.

"I—I think it is in my satchel," she murmured, faintly. "It must have fallen into it as I opened it."

"And where is your satchel?" cried Miss Daly, in consternation.

"I left it in the train," replied Beatrice, hurriedly, adding, "It will be all right; the guard will be sure to see it at the end of the journey, and save it for me. I will tell Wyndham about it as soon as I see him, and he will attend to the matter for me."

Instead of going to the boarding-house where she had written she would stop, she went directly to where he was stopping. The maid who opened the door looked curiously at the beautiful, stylish young lady and the cross, spectacled, elderly one standing on the porch.

"I suppose you wish to see Miss Jennie?" she said to Beatrice, without giving her time to state her errand. "She has just started with the young lord to call upon her friend, who is staying at the little cottage at the bend of the road."

"Miss Jennie!" cried Beatrice, in amazement; "pray, who is Miss Jennie?"

"That's Mr. Dudley's pretty young daughter," returned the maid; adding, with a knowing wink: "I don't think she will be Miss Jennie long if the handsome young lord has his way about it. They're together all the time."

"Direct me to the house where they have gone," said Beatrice, compressing her lips.

The next moment the two ladies had entered the hack again, and were driven quickly away.

"You have forgotten to give the number of the boarding-house to the driver," said Miss Daly, looking fretfully out of the window.

"We are not going to the boarding-house. I intend to drive directly to the place the maid mentioned, and to take my lover by surprise. He did not mention that there was a young lady in this house where he was staying. He has gone with her to make a call; he will be rather surprised when you and I walk in."

"What mad freak is this, Beatrice?" exclaimed Miss Daly, angrily.

In vain she attempted to dissuade the girl from

her purpose and to persuade her to go to her boarding-house; but all in vain.

Beatrice was not to be persuaded.

Miss Daly sank back in her seat in utter bewilderment, muttering that a man of spirit would certainly resent being followed about, even by his sweetheart. She little dreamed that it would end in one of the most pitiful of tragedies.

CHAPTER LX.

But to return to Donald Lindsay. From house to house he made his way, searching for the man who had sent the telegram to Beatrice. As he was walking along with head bent some one slapped him on the shoulder, and a familiar voice called out cheerily,—

"Why, if it isn't Donald Lindsay! What in the world are you doing in this out-of-the-way place, my dear fellow?"

"I might ask the same of you," exclaimed Donald Lindsay, in much surprise. "I suppose you will give me the answer habitual with lawyers—you are here on business."

"Well, to be candid with you," returned Mr. Jordan, "I will say I am here on a little affair connected with the heart. The facts, my sweet-heart is in the village, and I have followed her here."

Suddenly Donald Lindsay put his hand on the other's arm.

"Do you remember the story of my life which I told you not long ago?" he asked, huskily.

"Perfectly," returned the other. "I remember every detail of it, and I was greatly interested in it."

"Let us walk along together, and I will tell you of another and more thrilling act in my life's drama, which may be the closing one for me."

Mr. Jordan threw off all thoughts of self, and walked up the street, intent only on soothing the troubled mind of his friend.

He listened in wonder to the story, which sounded more like a romance than a reality. When he had finished Mr. Jordan had grown very pale.

"This is the first time I have ever heard you mention your wife's name. You—you say it is Beatrice?"

"Yes. Beatrice Daly Pelham is the name her card now bears."

"What! I—" shrieked Mr. Jordan. "What is that you say! Repeat it! My senses must be playing me false!"

"This is the card case which I found in her satchel," displaying the case which he had thrust into his breast-pocket to confront her with.

The moment Mr. Jordan saw it he recognised it, and a cry that came from his strong heart rose to his lips.

"My friend," he cried, huskily, "we have both been duped by the same woman. It is the girl you call your wife I was soon to wed. See, this is her picture."

As Mr. Jordan spoke he produced an excellent likeness of Beatrice, which had been taken but a few months ago.

"Yes, that is my wife—Beatrice," moaned Donald Lindsay, with a pitiful cry. Then he shrunk back from the lawyer, looking at him with horrified eyes, crying out to him: "Then it is you, my friend, who have stolen the love of my wife from me! It is you who sent her this telegram!"

"No," groaned the lawyer, "I did not send her that telegram; but I think I know who did. I sinned cruelly for this young woman's sake, and Heaven has found me out. I see through it all. Do not judge me, wrongly, Lindsay, but listen while I tell you all without keeping anything back. Let us sit down on this fallen log; I—I—feel weak."

In silence they sat down together, these two men who had loved so madly the same young girl. Donald Lindsay scarcely breathed as he listened to the story of Lord Pelham and the two young girls, one of whom was his heiress, and the other the child of Mary Seymour, the maid, whom the doctor had so blunderingly mixed in the hour of their birth.

He told the story of fair, sweet Hester and her lover, Wyndham Powis, a young English lord; than the startling story of how, in dying, Lord Pelham had sent for him, telling him to draw up the papers quickly, as he had proof that Hester, not Beatrice, was his granddaughter. To Hester he bequeathed his entire estate, and giving the proof into his hands, Lord Pelham fell back dead.

Mr. Jordan did not spare himself in the recital. He told how deeply he had fallen in love with Beatrice, and how grieved he was over the turn affairs had taken.

Poor though he knew Beatrice to be, he had asked her to be his wife. She, after a little consideration, had consented.

Then hearing of Hester's dangerous illness he had hurried thither with the papers in hand to inform Hester of her inheritance. But on arriving there he learned to his dismay that the girl had committed suicide by throwing herself into the bottomless creek a short time before.

It was then that the greatest temptation of his life had come to him.

Beatrice fell on her knees before him, pleading with him, in a voice that scorched his heart like a flame, to give out to the world that she and not Hester had been named as Lord Pelham's heiress.

"Hester is dead," she said, "it cannot harm her, and I, Heaven pardon me! listened. I am not the first man who has fallen through the love of woman. She wrung a consent from my lips, and I have never known a moment's happiness from that hour. My love for her drowned the voice of conscience."

"I do not know how it happened, but somehow the conviction came to me that she cared more for Wyndham Powis than she did for me."

"By the merest chance a friend of mine, whom she did not know, stood beside her in the booking-office when she bought a ticket for this place, and informed me of it. Although she had kept her whereabouts a secret from me for over a fortnight, saying she was about to go to a sick friend, and I must not visit her, I came on here."

"The papers I spoke of are with me. I was going to ask her to renounce the fortune when she became my wife."

"But it is all over now, and as I utter these words, my love story is ended. From this moment I cast all thoughts of her out of my life. I have honour enough left not to enshrine another man's wife's image in my heart."

"Then this man Wyndham Powis, or Lord Powis, as you call him, must be in this village."

"Undoubtedly."

"Will you go with me to him, and give him the proofs, that he too may give me my wife?" asked Donald Lindsay.

"Yes," returned his companion; and the wronged husband and his friend renewed their search more vigorously.

At the very moment when they arose from the log Beatrice and Miss Daly alighted from the carriage in front of the cottage which but a moment before they had seen, as they drove up the street, Wyndham Powis and a lady entered.

They had scarcely taken their seats in the handsomely-furnished little parlour ere Beatrice and Miss Daly were ushered in by the little maid. Beatrice said, as the maid entered, that she wished to see the gentleman who had come a moment ago.

Wyndham Powis's amazement upon beholding Beatrice was great. Her jealousy upon seeing him with Mr. Dudley's beautiful daughter was so great that she began to heap reproaches upon him.

"Beatrice, hear me," he said, with dignity. "You are mistaken. You do both this young lady and myself an injustice. We are here to call upon a young lady friend of hers whom she wished me to meet."

At that moment the door opened. A woman stood on the threshold. A great cry broke from Miss Daly's lips.

"Look!" she cried. "Look, Beatrice! That is the woman who kidnapped poor Hester! What is she doing here!"

In the same instant Wyndham Powis recognised the woman as well, and sprang forward. The woman did not attempt to move. She was

fairly rooted to the spot. She had not known that there were any strangers in the house when she entered the room.

Seeing Beatrice, Lord Powis, and Miss Daly standing there paralysed her. She could scarcely think, not even when Wyndham Powis strode up to her and grasped her by the arm.

"Save me from them, Beatrice!" she cried. "Come to me a moment. I—I have something to whisper to you—something these people must not hear."

"How dare you address me so familiarly?" cried the girl.

"For your own sake, Beatrice, hear what I have to say before it is too late."

"You have nothing to say, woman, that would interest me," replied the girl.

"I command you to listen!" cried the woman. "In another instant it may be too late."

"I refuse to listen to you now. I may hear you later. I—" The sentence was never finished.

The door on the opposite side of the room opened, and a young girl stepped over the threshold.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting, Jennie," she said in a sweet voice, which suddenly ended in a scream as her eyes fell first upon Wyndham Powis and then upon Beatrice and Miss Daly.

In an instant the shadow which had hung like a pall over Hester's memory was torn aside.

She sprang across the room, and would have flung herself into Wyndham Powis's arms, but Beatrice stepped before her.

In the excitement they did not hear the outer bell ring, nor hear the tramp of feet in the passage-way without as two men came to the door.

"He is mine!" cried Beatrice, facing Hester, "and you shall not take him, though you have come back from the watery grave in which that woman told me you were lying fathoms deep out of all harm's way. You shall not take Wyndham Powis from me! I will marry him within the hour, or—die! Do you hear me?"

"I think not," said a grave voice behind her; and striding into the room, Donald Lindsay, followed by Mr. Jordan, confronted the guilty girl. "You will marry no man, for you are my wife," he repeated in a terrible voice.

"You!" she cried, cowering from him, her face pale as death. "And you!" she moaned, pointing to Mr. Jordan.

"Your husband knows all," said the lawyer, firmly, who had by this time found his voice and recovered from the amazement of finding Hester alive.

She looked from one to the other like a hunted deer, then past them to Wyndham Powis.

"The game is up!" she cried, with a wild laugh. "I have played heavily for a fortune, and lost. They say 'the wages of sin is death'!"

Something flashed quickly in the dim light. There was a quick report, followed instantly by another.

Mary Seymour and Beatrice fell side by side, mortally wounded—wounded unto death by Beatrice's hand.

"My child! Oh, Heaven! my child!" moaned Mary Seymour.

But the girl she had planned and suffered for unto death turned away with hatred in her face. Another moment and all was over with Beatrice. We will draw the curtain over the scene which followed, and pass over the sad but joyful re-uniting of the lovers. They were married quietly a few weeks' later, and Hester and her adoring young husband went to live in retirement until the excitement blew over.

Two years after they returned to visit Jennie Dudley and attend her wedding with Mr. Jordan.

Donald Lindsay never looked again on a woman's face; his heart was buried in Beatrice's tomb. But he learned to love the children that came to Hester in time, and one of the strong, sturdy, little lads he made his heir.

But he never ceases telling the children of that fatal elopement which marred his whole life.

"Marry the one you love, if you can," he said, "but never slope!"

THE END.]

THE TEMPTATION OF ELAINE.

(Continued from page 201.)

August came, and brought with it the memory of the days when she had first met and known Carey eight years ago. Was it so long since he had come into her life? Ah! she was younger and fairer then—also for her buried youth! How should she bear to live through the long months of his absence? How meet him changed and indifferent to her, or perhaps the husband of some happier woman than she?

"Truly," she murmured, "I have ruined my own life. I refused his love, and now I would die to bring it back for a year—a month!"

At last one beautiful evening he came to wish her good-bye; on the morrow he was going to town, from whence he would sail the following day. It was growing dusk in the garden when he begged her to walk with him there, and he could scarcely see her face, partly because she kept it steadily averted, partly because of the cloudy lace she wore about her head. Up and down, up and down, and it seemed to Elaine that as he talked she must cry out to him not to go—must tell him how, at last, she had learned to love him and could not live without him. Oh! how her heart ached—how far away his voice sounded. She dared not lift her eyes to the grave dark face above lest he should read her utter misery in them; and when she answered his questions or addressed him her words were very few, because she knew all passion trembled in her tones. At last they paused at the gate, and she leaned upon it very glad of any support, and Carey spoke in a melancholy voice.

"To-night I almost wish I were not going; I have a sort of feeling that I shall be home-sick long before the two years are gone, and beside that, in such a lengthened absence my friends will all have time to forget my existence. Ismay will have grown a young woman, and I shall scarcely recognise her as the tall thin schoolgirl of to day; and you!—what changes will have come to you?"

"I shall be a little older, a little graver," with an attempt to speak cheerfully; "that is always supposing I live so long!"

The faintly mournful cadence in her tone arrested his attention at last.

"I believe," he said, bending to look at her. "I believe, Elaine, you are a little sorry that I am going!"

"Yes," she answered, simply, "I am sorry; I shall miss our pleasant walks and talks, and you will not return to us the same. Perhaps you will bring a wife with you, who, not knowing me, will object to our friendship—"

He interrupted her passionately.

"I shall never marry; I am far too confirmed a bachelor to entertain the idea of matrimony, and as for our friendship, Elaine, nothing can change that. I believe you can trust me; I can recall no time when I failed you!" and he smiled then, as if to leave no impression of pain or anger upon her.

The moon had risen, and now flooded the garden with light; Elaine's lace scarf had fallen back, and the soft rays fell upon her hair, nestling in its pretty waves, shining on her white face and mournful eyes.

A sudden impulse came upon the man beside her to catch her in his arms, and swear never to let her go until she had promised all his love demanded. But he had not yet lost all self-control; only old thoughts, old memories, old longings woke in his heart to keener life, and the anguish of vain love had grown intolerable.

Why was this woman not for him? Had he not served her well and faithfully? Did not his constancy reveal Gerard's faithlessness in more glaring colours? Could it be possible she still loved him? How silent she was, how pale!

"Something has troubled you!" he said, and his deep-toned voice was uncertain, shaken with the conflict of his soul.

Elaine moved, as if impatiently, and then answered,—

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"No, you are mistaken. Perhaps I am a little overcome by the heat of the day; and—*and*, Mr. Vanrenan, I don't think I have thanked you as I should for all your goodness. Perhaps your going shows me this. I want to tell you that despite my seeming coldness I am very grateful to you, and prize your friendship more highly than I can tell. I probably should not say this to you now were you not going away, and we may never meet again. A hundred things may occur to part us for all time, death even may snatch one of us away. You see, I am not very hopeful, one never is, save in early youth, before one has known disappointment and heavy grief."

"She is thinking of *Massey*," was Vanrenan's unspoken thought, and the anguish in his heart cried out against restraint, and cast off the yoke that had so long bound it in silence.

He caught Elaine's slim hand in his.

"It is by my own choice I am leaving home, and yet I hate going. The thought of leaving you unmans me. If by any chance you could have loved me, Heaven! what a happy life yours should have been! But I have spoken of my love, and shown it by every deed of mine, not once, but many times, and nothing I have said or done has touched your heart!"

She was trembling, but she did not draw her hands from his, and he went on rapidly.

"Do not suppose I blame you. Love cannot be bought or sold. You chose your lot long ago, and so, because you and I can never be more to each other than we are to-night, I am going—not to learn forgetfulness (that would be a vain task to set myself), but to win a little rest from the hourly and daily struggle between my love and my will. I meant to go without a word of this to you, but a man cannot always keep silence. So forgive me."

Then he caught her in his arms, and kissed her, as he had done once before, long ago—kissed her on brow, and eyelids, and lips; then, putting her away, he opened the gate and passed out on to the road.

When she heard his slowly-retreating steps, when she felt he still loved her, and all her fears and doubts had been causeless, she forgot everything but her great need of him, and, stretching out imploring hands, cried to him,—

"Oh, no! no! You must not go! I—I cannot let you go! I—I cannot let you go!"

At her cry he turned, moved towards her, with happiness and doubt struggling for supremacy in his expression.

"Elaine!" hoarsely, "you are not playing with me! What is it you mean?"

"That I love you!" she murmured, falteringly. "Carey, Carey, I love you!"

In an instant he had her in his arms.

"My darling! my darling!"

He did not question if her words were true, because he read their confirmation in her lovely eyes.

What a long silence they had kept! But now Elaine spoke.

"You will not go away now, Carey!"

"My darling, no!" and held her the more closely.

Two days after the *Serapis* sailed, but Vanrenan was not among her passengers; but she carried a letter to Mrs. Lake with the happy news of his betrothal.

Rather more than two years passed, and the Vanrenans were in town with the Lakes for the purpose of witnessing Ismay's presentation at Court.

Elaine, who had now been a wife a year and nine months, was looking prettier and even younger than before her marriage.

Carey said she had found out the secret of eternal youth, and intended figuring as a second *Ninon d'Enclos*, which remark Elaine always rewarded by pulling the short, curly hair, now slightly streaked with grey.

Even her manner was changed, her new happiness having developed a gentle playfulness in her, which the troubles of her early days had crushed; and with it all she had a sweet wifely dignity that sat well upon her.

Those who had known Carey in the past said his second marriage had amply atoned for the

misery of his first; and society made much of the gentle, unassuming mistress of Claremont Hall.

Once Elaine and her husband met Gerard and Mab at the Royal Academy. The husband looked confused, but the young wife was very volatile and effusive in her greetings.

She was magnificently dressed, but the life of pleasure she had led stole the roses from her cheeks, and aged her many years.

Her manner was forced and artificial, her conversation flippant.

Gerard himself had the air of a man who had exhausted all the gaieties, and, therefore, found nothing good in life.

He had simply drifted with the stream, and tried to make Mab's pleasures his; but now he was wearied out, tired of her whims, her shallow wit, and that meeting with his old love recalled to him bitterly what happiness might have been his.

Remorse and regret filled his heart for many a long day, and something very like love for the woman who had been so true to her word.

[THE END.]

OF LONG AGO.

ENVELOPED in perfume wherever it stands,
This quaint little box with pearl inlaid,
It whispers of travels in far-off lands,
And the treasures it held of one sweet maid.

A packet of letters all yellow and torn,
And wrapped in a square of filmy lace,
A hoop of gold that is thin and worn,
On a tablet of ivory—a soldier's face.

And so they found it, one autumn day,
Pressed to the heart that would beat no more.
"Among the dying and dead he lay,"
Was the only message they brought to her.

Long years have gone with rapid pace,
At rest the heart that was rent in twain,
And dried are the tears on the yellow lace
Since the maid and her soldier have met again.

THERE are not many true parasites in the vegetable kingdom. The mistletoe is unquestionably one of the most perfect samples of this class of vegetable growth. It is absolutely dependent upon its host for subsistence, and in time draws the very life-blood from the plant to which it attaches itself. Experiments have been made in raising the mistletoe in greenhouses, but the results are scarcely satisfactory. The mistletoe is an exceedingly slow-growing plant, two leaves and a bit of stalk being all that is usually produced during the season; therefore some of the gnarled and knotty branches which we see in our markets represent long years of patient endeavour.

In the manufacture of soap there is often a large amount of lye left over. This, of course, is a waste product, and heretofore no attempt has been made to turn it to account. A series of experiments has demonstrated that glycerine and soda can be recovered from this waste by means of electrolysis. The following is the description of the process: The anode is a plate of zinc or carbon in contact with the liquor under treatment; the cathode is in a porous pot. The current decomposes the caustic soda, forming sodium hydrate at the cathode; the glycerine is set free, while the albuminoid and colouring matters are rendered insoluble and are easily removed by filtration. After this treatment the insoluble matter is separated out and the liquid is distilled, forming a perfectly pure, clear glycerine, the caustic soda being also practically pure and usable by the soapmaker.

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A. BROOKMAN, 11, HAND COURT, HOLBORN, LONDON, W.C. Est. 1855.

FACETIE.

He : "Am I good enough for you, darling?" She : "No, George; but you are too good for any other girl."

"A man who is just married tells his wife everything." "Yes?" "And after he gets better acquainted with her he doesn't tell her anything."

FIRST NEWSBOY : "There goes a gent. / Chase him." Second Newsboy : "No use. Just saw him come out of a barber's shop. He's heard all the news there."

"ALAS, alas, I am undone!" exclaimed the heroine. "Never mind, miss, go on with your part. It don't show," said the prompter, sotto voce.

"DAWKINS is better dressed than any man in the club." "Yaa; he deserves great credit for his taste in dress." "Well, he gets it from his tailor."

"He is extremely reticent about his family," Helen observed. "Hum—must be a good man of bad family or a bad man of good family. You had best encourage him," said her brother.

"That fellow puzzles me—I can't make out whether he's a philosopher or a fool." "That's easy to find out." "How?" "Call him the latter. If he makes a fuss he isn't the former."

TOM TOPNOT : "Hullo, Jack, how do you do?" Jack Plunger : "I (hic) do as I (hic) blame please, thank you." Tom Topnot : "I see—when does your wife get back?"

FINNS : "I tried to pay the New Woman a compliment last night in my speech, but it didn't seem to be appreciated." Ginnis : "What did you say?" Finns : "I said that the New Woman would leave large footprints in the sands of time.

"YOUNG man," began the aged gentleman, "I am seventy years old and I don't remember having told a lie." "That's too bad," the young man replied; "can't you have something done for your memory?"

THE tickets to a village ball were not transferable, and this was the way they read:—"Admit this gentleman to ball in Assembly Rooms. No gentleman admitted unless he comes himself."

"THARNA'S one thing," remarked Willie Washington, "that I have made up my mind to." "Really?" responded Miss Cayenne, with languid interest. "Yes. I shall never be a man of one idea." "Don't say that. You are still too young to be discouraged."

"It's a very serious charge," said the judge, "throwing brick at the plaintiff's head. Have you anything to say before I send you to prison for a fortnight?" "It was only half a brick." "In that case," said the judge, "you will be imprisoned for a week."

MRS. JOBB : "What on earth is that?" Mr. Jobbs : "This, my dear, is a barometer—a present from our son at college." "Oh, I've heard of them. Isn't the dear boy thoughtful! Which way do we screw it when we want the weather to be fine?"

THE great actor looked very much offended. "These people must be barbarians," he exclaimed. "What makes you think that?" "I have been at this place for three hours, and nobody knows who I am." "How can you tell?" "I haven't had any requests for free passes to the show."

THE Dear Child : "Oh, Mrs. Brown, when did you get back?" Mrs. Brown : "Bless you, dear, I was not away anywhere. What made you think so?" The Dear Child : "I thought you were. I heard my mamma say that you were at Loggerheads with your husband for over a week."

It was at a crowded reception the other night, and they sat on the stairs in a shady spot. "What a mob," he said; "just listen to the roar! Aren't you glad that you're not being squeezed to death down there?" "Yes," she murmured, demurely, "down there!" And he took the hint.

WAGSTAFF : "I stood on one foot all the way home in a crowded railway-carriage last night." Joaks : "What was the matter with your other foot?" Wagstaff : "Another man was standing on that!"

SPANISH GENERAL : "Are you the brave captain who with only four hundred men captured those three sleeping Cuban soldiers?" Spanish Captain (modestly) : "Yes, after; and only lost seventeen men in the engagement." Spanish General : "Unprecedented! Phenomenal! I only not promote you, sir; but will recommend your valour to the Home Office for knighthood."

THERE was once an Irishman who had a face on him that, as one of his friends once remarked, was "an offence to the landscape." Next to his homeliness, his poverty was the most conspicuous thing about him. Hence the unsympathetic comment of a neighbour. "How are ye, Pat?" he asked. "Mighty bad," was the reply; "sure 'tis starvation that's starvin' me in the face." "Is that so?" rejoined his friend. "Sure it can't be very pleasant for ayther of ye."

"Yes," my dear, six months after we were married Jack and I made up our minds that we weren't a bit suited for each other," said Mrs. Uptodate, feelingly; "so like sensible people we faced the inevitable. Jack lets me go my way and—" "And you let him go his way, I suppose!" said Miss Verdant, sympathetically. "Good gracious, my dear! I should just like to see him try it!" exclaimed Mrs. Uptodate, indignantly.

"I DON'T like a friend to domineer over me," said the young man with the patient disposition. "Who has been doing that?" "Fellow I chum with. He borrowed my evening clothes." "Pretty cool cheek that." "I didn't mind it. But when he asked for my umbrella, I told him I might want to use it myself. But he got it just the same." "How?" "He simply stood on his dignity, and said: 'All right; have your own way about it. They're your clothes I'm trying to keep from getting spoiled; not mine.'"

BILKINS : "How is business, Wilkins?" Wilkins : "Can't make it go. At this rate I'll be bankrupt in another month. I don't seem to have any head for business." Bilkins : "No, you haven't, but you have a good stand, and if you'll promise to keep hands off and let me run things, I'll go in with you as partner." Wilkins : "Done. A friend in need is a friend indeed." Guest of Mr. Wilkins (ten years after) : "What a magnificent place you have!—everything that wealth could buy or heart wish! You have been wonderfully prosperous, Mr. Wilkins." Mr. Wilkins (sadly) : "True, but after all I get only half the profits of my great establishment. I just tell you, my old friend, the mistake of my life was in taking a partner."

CARLYLE's severest critic, and a critic of his own school, was an old parish roadman at Ecclefechan. "Been a long time in this neighbourhood?" "Aye, sir." "Then you'll know the Carlysles?" "Weel that! A ken the whole of them. There was, let me see," he said, leaning on his shovel, and pondering; "there was Jock; he was a kind o' throughther sort o' chap, a doctor, but no a bad fellow, Jock—he's dead, mon." "And there was Thomas," said the inquirer, eagerly. "Oh, ay, of course, there's Tam—a useless, sunstruck chap that writes in London. There's naething in Tam; but, mon, there's Jamie, owre in the Newlands—there's a chap for ye. Jamie takes mair swine into Ecclefechan market than any ither farmer i' the parsh."

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Soldiers' Home, Norwich, writes: "It is with grateful feelings that I add my testimony to the effects of your WIND PILLS. For years I was afflicted with severe pains in the body, arising from

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At times my sufferings were excruciating, and night after night I have sat up having hot turpentine flannels, &c., applied; but these and all other means produced no beneficial results. After taking a few doses of your WIND PILLS I lost all the pain, and have never suffered from it since. I am recommending them largely to my friends."

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PAGE WOODCOCK, LINCOLN.

SOCIETY.

THE Princess of Wales and Princess Victoria will probably visit Denmark again in the autumn, when Prince Christian will be married to Duchess Alexandra of Mecklenburg-Schwerin.

It is fully settled that the Duke of York shall be raised to the rank of Rear-Admiral on the occasion of the Jubilee. This intelligence will give great satisfaction throughout the navy, the Duke having identified himself in every way with the sea service, in which he takes the most lively interest.

APARTMENTS will be prepared in Buckingham Palace for the reception of the Prince and Princess of Naples, who are to arrive from Italy on the morning of Monday, the 21st inst., to represent the Italian Court at the Queen's Diamond Jubilee fêtes. Their Royal Highnesses will proceed to Scotland on the termination of their London visit.

THE Archduke Francis Ferdinand is now quite restored to health, so he will come to London for the Jubilee as the representative of his uncle, the Emperor Francis Joseph, to whose throne he is heir-presumptive. The Archduke Francis Ferdinand is one of the richest Royal personages in Europe, having inherited (through his mother) the enormous D'Este fortune.

THE Jubilee festivities are to begin on Monday, the 21st inst., and according to present arrangements, they will terminate with the Aldershot review on Thursday, July 1st. The Queen is to "receive" the Royal guests at Buckingham Palace between half-past three and five o'clock on Monday, the 21st. Her Majesty intending to arrive in town from Windsor on that day in time for luncheon.

MARLBOROUGH HOUSE and Clarence House are both being prepared to receive distinguished guests for the coming season and Commemoration week, and both these Royal residences will have every room occupied all through the season. Hospitality on a lavish scale will be the rule, and the Prince of Wales's wedding-plate, which is almost as fine as anything at Windsor, is being got ready for use at the big dinner-parties which will be almost nightly occurrences this month.

SOME surprise is being expressed that the Queen will not return from Balmoral until within about four days of the great day, but it is really a wise arrangement, as her Majesty will be braced by the fine air for her onerous duties in Commemoration week, and the Prince of Wales is relied upon to arrange every detail. As a matter of fact the Queen is being troubled as little as possible about the matter, and the talked about great preparations at Windsor Castle scarcely exceed the freshening-up process usually carried out at this time of year.

LIKE her two little brothers, the tiny Princess of York who has made such a very propitious advent at Sandringham is said to be a very fine child. It is thought likely that the baptism will take place at the Chapel Royal, St. James's. The Queen will, of course, be one of the sponsors, and she will naturally be given the name of Victoria in addition to various others, but it is hardly likely that her Majesty will be present at the christening, unless, of course, it is postponed until the Jubilee week.

AMONGST the Royal guests of the Queen for the coming Jubilee celebration will be the young Prince Max of Baden, who, owing to the recent death of his father, has now become heir-presumptive to the Grand Duchy. As is usual with young German Princes, rumour has been busy with the name of Prince Maximilian in connection with matrimonial projects or possibilities, and there have been whispers of a possible engagement between the Prince and charming Princess Victoria of Schleswig-Holstein. Be this as it may, the fact that he is coming to England for the Commemoration festivities will probably result in something definite being known one way or the other. Prince Max, who is thirty in July, is a captain in the smart Prussian Regiment of Cuirassiers of the Guard. He is very fond of England and the English.

STATISTICS.

THE average depth of the Atlantic Ocean is 4,015 yards.

The risk of being struck by lightning is five times greater in the country than in cities.

The average residue of ashes left after the cremation of the human body amounts only to 8oz.

It has been calculated that the quantity of sweets consumed in England every year is between 160,000 and 150,000 tons.

THE railway companies of Great Britain pay an average every day of £1,700 in compensation, about 60 per cent. being for injuries to passengers, and the remainder for lost or damaged freight.

GEMS.

HISTORY makes haste to record great deeds, but often neglects good ones.

MOST of us in our apprentice days feel mighty enough to bear the burden of success, but how many have the strength to fail!

IT is an inevitable law that a man cannot be happy unless he lives for something higher than his own happiness.

IT is with narrow-souled people as with narrow-necked bottles: the less they have in them the more noise they make in pouring it out.

WRITE it on your heart that every day is the best in the year. No man has learned anything rightly until he knows that every day is doomsday.

THAT which we acquired with the most difficulty we retain the longest; as those who have earned a fortune are usually more careful of it than those who have inherited it.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

ITALIAN SAUCE.—Brown an onion and a garlic in one-half spoonful of drippings seasoned with salt and pepper to suit taste. Add one-quarter of a can of strained tomatoes, and simmer for forty-five minutes. Mix lightly just before serving.

SCALLOPED ONIONS.—Boil the onions until tender, then put in a baking dish and pour over a sauce made of one tablespoonful of butter rubbed into one and one-half tablespoonfuls of flour; pour over it one pint of hot milk, and cook until like custard. Bake half an hour.

RHUBARB SAUCE.—Cut the rhubarb into half-inch pieces, leaving the skin on. Put in a stew pan and cover thickly with granulated sugar. Do not add any water, the juice from the rhubarb will soon flow, making its own liquid.

BUTTERED BEETS.—Boil three large beets until tender. Peel, chop rather coarse, and put into a hot tureen. Heat one-half a cupful of vinegar with one tablespoonful of butter, one tablespoonful of sugar, one-half a teaspoonful of salt and half a saltspoonful of pepper. Pour over the beets and let stand ten minutes before serving.

BAKED CAULIFLOWER.—Select a head of cauliflower with its green leaves attached, and see to it that there are no dark spots on the head or stems. Pick off the leaves (which are edible). Soak the head in cold water, slightly salted, for one hour (top downwards) and drain. Put it in a deep saucepan, cover with salted boiling water, and simmer fifteen minutes. Remove the scum or it will discolour the head. Drain and divide the branches; put them in a baking tin, add boiled milk enough to prevent burning, an ounce of butter, and salt and white pepper for seasoning. Sift over it a layer of breadcrumbs and bake for ten minutes.

MISCELLANEOUS.

SOME of the railroad lines in Russia have smoking cars for ladies.

ALL being well the Empress Frederick will accompany her august mother on Commemoration Day during the great drive, their Majesties being seated side by side.

INDIA-RUBBER is meeting with favour as a paving for streets. It was first tried on a bridge in Hanover a little more than a year ago, and has proved so satisfactory that experiments with it for ordinary roadways are being made in Berlin and Hamburg.

THE most beautiful crabs in the world are produced in the neighbourhood of the Farallon Islands, off the Pacific coast. They are called "red rock crabs," and specimens sometimes sell in the market of San Francisco for from £1 to £2 each, merely for curiosities.

AS a result of the discoveries made in Röntgen-ray photography of the identity of actinic rays of light with those which occasion sunstroke, it is proposed to line the British soldier's helmet with a strip of ruby-coloured material as the best protection for the brain.

RUSSIAN doctors are hereafter to wear as a sign that they are legally qualified to practice, a little crest or badge, a silver oval plate an inch and a half long by an inch wide, on which is a design of two intertwined serpents. The object is to increase the safety of the weaver in the less civilised parts of the country.

NO part of a tree can be removed from the grounds of Holyrood Palace without the permission of the Queen. One, dating from the reign of Queen Mary, was recently blown down, and before the gardeners could touch it a photograph had to be forwarded to the Queen, who formally ordered its removal.

THE latest novelty in the London theatres and music-halls is a development of the animatograph. The news of the night is to be thrown upon the screen when the curtain falls at the end of an act or turn. Thus, during the intervals, the audience will be able to read the latest items of news, and the tedium of long waits will be removed.

ONE of the curiosities of Chatsworth is a weeping willow made of copper, and so dexterously fashioned that at a distance it resembles a real tree. It is actually a shower-bath, for, by pressing a secret trap, a tiny spray of water can be made to burst forth from every branch and twig of the tree, to the discomfort of any who may be under it.

IN Denmark a new type of boat has been built, which is rightfully called an amphibian boat, as it can propel itself with its own power in water as well as on land. It is provided with a screw-propeller for navigation, and with wheels to travel on land like a locomotive. As soon as it reaches the land the wheels of the boat grasp the rails, and it is then controlled like an ordinary locomotive.

A NOVEL invention recently patented is a marine floating safe, designed to preserve mail-bags and other valuables from being destroyed with the sinking of a vessel. It is elliptical in form, and has an outer shell or armour-plate sufficiently thick to withstand the force of the waves. The safe is to rest in a suitable cradle or depression in the deck, so that it can float free from the vessel in case of foundering.

ON a dangerous sunken rock at the entrance to the harbour of Odessa, Russia's chief port on the Black Sea, work has just begun on what, when completed, will be the strangest lighthouse in the world. The basement will be in the form of waves, and will not rise much above the level of the water. On this will be placed a colossal statue of Christ holding aloft the Cross, in the centre of which will shine a powerful light to show the fishermen of that perilous sea the safe course to the haven of rest. The design for this curious lighthouse is now on exhibition in St. Petersburg.



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These Stories can be safely recommended to equal, if not surpass, anything that has previously appeared in the LONDON READER.

DO NOT MISS READING THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

P. K.—Bets cannot be enforced by legal action.

DOUBTFUL.—The wages are by no means tempting.

AIV.—You had better far get it done by a solicitor.

R. G.—You should get a solicitor to inquire for you.

J. V.—A phenomenally low price is the correct form.

GUARD.—The rules are not published for general circulation.

R. D.—It is well to apply it as thick as it will spread comfortably.

R. K.—All his personal estate devolves on the widow and children.

PRIEST.—If the wife left no will all the property goes to her husband.

SURGEON.—A little soda-water will relieve sick headache caused by indigestion.

HOUSEWIFE.—Tough meat is made tender by lying a few minutes in vinegar water.

QUAESTOR.—Herodotus was the greatest historian and father of all written history.

V. E.—Columbus was a Spanish navigator who lived a thousand years after Columbus.

NORMAN.—The document you wish to have prepared need not cost more than 5 guineas.

GRACIE.—Well-ventilated bed-rooms will prevent morning headaches and lassitude.

AMBITIOUS.—It takes both talent and experience to conceive and construct a good story.

NED.—You will have to enter the Navy at the lowest rating and gradually work your way up.

LOLA.—No matter how good your voice is naturally, it will take years of culture to perfect it.

BORROW.—The first Bank Holiday under Sir John Lubbock's Act was held on August 7th, 1871.

BETTY.—A point to remember in bread-baking is that well-kneaded bread retains its moisture and keeps much longer.

RALPH.—Orders to view the royal palaces are granted by the Lord Chamberlain, and they may be obtained gratis.

IGORAMUS.—The Duke and Duchess of York stand next in succession after the Prince and Princess of Wales.

L. M.—If you go to Somerset House the officials will give you all necessary help. It cannot be done without trouble.

WORMS.—They frequently go off song in this manner without any apparent cause. Mix lettuce seed with its other food.

SOMMERS.—The only way is to inquire for scholars among your acquaintances who know your musical proficiency.

N. G.—It is a sheer impossibility, and we can only wonder at your giving a moment's credit to such a preposterous story.

DENMARK.—A husband is not responsible for debts incurred by his wife before marriage, but the woman herself can be sued.

BLUE FUNK.—A lady may wear any ring except the wedding-ring, without anything being meant except her love of ornament.

INTERESTED.—Madame Récamier was a celebrated leader of society in Paris, who was renowned for her extraordinary beauty, modesty, and accomplishments. She was born in 1777 and died in 1846.

DUBIOUS.—It is a great mistake to use an assumed name in any affair, and especially in so serious a matter as a marriage ceremony.

HISTER.—We do not know of any published exclusively for the purpose; you will usually find some in general household books.

OLD READER.—The second marriage being voided by the appearance of the first husband the children are illegitimate, and can take any name.

G. L.—He can claim damages only if he can prove that the accident occurred through the neglect of his employers or their responsible servants.

PATER.—A very stiff examination must be passed before the boy can become a properly qualified chemist; and we think you had better cast about for some other employment for the lad.

SUPERSTITIONS.—In this enlightened age such foolish superstitions are being quickly relegated to obscurity. In the majority of cases good or bad luck is but a synonym for good or bad judgment.

COUNSEL.

ANXIOUS mother, bending low

O'er thy child now calmly sleeping,

Seek not its destiny to know,

Leave it in the Father's keeping.

Then do well the mother's part—

Gently training, gently leading—

Guide the restless, untired heart

With love's chiding, with love's pleading.

Never doubting, sow the seed,

Watch it budding into beauty;

Take out every useless weed;

From the firm, straight path of duty.

Simple teaching, pure and plain,

Will its little life be moulding

Into one bright golden chain,

Day by day for thee unfolding.

Careful mother, turn aside,

Turn with tears of deep contrition

From the taunting voice of pride,

Tempting thee with earth's ambition.

Holier thoughts should now be thine,

Upward gaze toward Heaven's portal;

Thy child must bow before this shrine—

Teach it to win a crown immortal!

CONSTANT READER.—There must be practical experience and a positive knowledge of the applicant's capabilities before there can be an appointment to any responsible position.

F. H.—A marriage is legal even though one of the parties to the marriage gives an assumed name, but it causes trouble in proving the marriage in a court of law if ever necessary.

EDIE.—Decaying teeth may, under certain conditions, be stopped and the decay arrested; meanwhile they should be well brushed out daily with camphorated chalk.

F. W.—The best way will be for the son to apply to the Probate Office for instructions how to take out letters of administration, the son and daughter agreeing who shall be the trustee pending their coming of age.

R. B.—The only way we can suggest is that you find someone who has lived in one of these countries and will undertake to teach you the peculiar accent and provincialisms.

IMPEDIMENTA.—Put it in the animal's mouth, and as often as he lets go restore it again, until it dawns upon him that he is not to worry but to carry; encourage him with praise, but scold his failures; in course of a week his education should be complete.

WERDON.—Glommen, the largest river of Norway, from the town of Røros to the Ojern Lake, is described as a mountain torrent. It has more than twenty cataracts, the principal one being the celebrated Sarpsfoss, half a mile above the town of that name.

CURIOUS.—The body of a drowned person after lying in the water for some time becomes filled with gas, formed by decomposition, and these eventually render it so much lighter than the water that, following natural rules, it comes to the surface.

WATCHER.—In such a case as you describe you may, if you can, take your children by force, and bring them to your home. If they are purposely kept from you by your wife's relations you must act through a solicitor, and apply to the Courts for an order.

EMUL.—An appetising supper dish is made as follows: Have ready six oysters for each person; put a tablespoonful of butter in the chafing-dish, and when hot, lay in a close layer of oysters; brown on both sides, adding butter if necessary; season with salt and pepper, and serve with lemon and saltine wafers.

INFUSED.—The most speedy mode of procuring relief after receiving a bruise is to plunge the finger into water as hot as can be borne. By so doing the nail is softened, and yields so as to accommodate itself to the blood poured out beneath it, and the agony is soon diminished. The finger may then be wrapped in a broad and water poultice.

LOLLIE.—For a two pound tin of Australian mutton, first strainer six sliced onions and twelve sliced potatoes in a pint of thin stock for half an hour, or if you have cold boiled potatoes simmer the sliced onions alone, then add the mutton cut in slices and the cold boiled potatoes, if moderate-sized, left whole, or if large cut in half, season to taste with pepper and salt, and simmer all together for fifteen minutes, and serve very hot.

DRAUGEN.—If we fret and worry and complain we make anything that is a little hard seem a great deal harder. If we take a journey and will not see any of the pleasant objects as we pass along, but persist in dwelling upon all that is disagreeable, the way will seem very long and very tiresome. A journey is very much what we make it; so is our life. It is usually our own fault if we find nothing along the way to give us any pleasure or happiness.

R. P.—There is good evidence of at least three persons who might be entitled to the name; and probably the experiences or doings of all three have been rolled into one by the monkish chroniclers who are responsible for such accounts of the life of the saint as we possess; evidence points, however, to his having been born at Kilpatrick on the Clyde, near the southern end of the great wall erected by the Roman Emperor Agricola to keep back the Picts or Caledonians; his father was a magistrate.

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To J. T. DAVENPORT.

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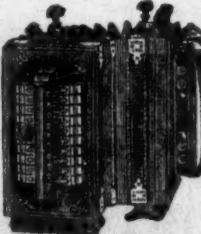
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